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# **First-Person Reference**

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University College London  
PhD in Philosophy  
2007

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## **Abstract**

It is argued that reference in first-person thought is distinct from reference in other thoughts about objects. This difference is located in the lack of acquaintance required for first-person thought. In order to be in the position to think about and refer to other objects, a subject must be acquainted with them. It is this acquaintance relation which enables him to think about a particular object. In contrast, a subject can think about himself without being acquainted with himself because he is the subject of his thought. No acquaintance relation is required in order for him to be in a position to think about himself – he is in this position already.

Part I of this thesis sets out the problem of first-person thought, and introduces a distinction between subjective and objective first-person thought. Part II explores singular thought, and what it is for a subject to have a thought about a particular object. It is argued that a subject's acquaintance with an object is necessary for him to be able to think about and refer to an independent object. This means that for a subject to think about an independent object that object must in some way be present to him. In Part III it is argued that for a subject to think first-personally the object – himself – need not be present to him. The subject has experiences from the first-person perspective, grounding his subjective first-person thoughts. Because he has such experiences he can refer reflexively. He is at the centre of his scheme of reference. And it is because he can refer in subjective first-person thoughts that he can refer in objective first-person thoughts.

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I dedicate this thesis to him, and to our children Ollie and Grace. Ollie was born two months after I began work on this thesis, and Grace arrived twenty-one months later. Now they are five and three. I hope they have not noticed how much of my time has been taken up with this thesis over the last five years.



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## Introduction

This thesis is about first-person reference. But it is not about to *what* a subject refers when he thinks first-personally. Indeed, one consequence of the proposal is that the subject does not need to know to what he refers when he successfully refers first-personally. Instead it is about *how* a subject refers first-personally, and, crucially, in what respect this differs from how he is able to refer to other objects.

The proposal is that in order to think about an independent object a subject must be acquainted with that object. But in order to refer first-personally, the subject does not need to be acquainted with himself. Reference in first-person thought is distinct from reference in other thoughts about objects.

The thesis is divided into three parts:

Part I: First-Person Thought

Part II: Acquaintance

Part III: First-Person Reference without Acquaintance

In Part I, the problem of first-person thought is introduced. Anscombe (1975) argues that what is required for a subject to refer to an object is not present in the case of first-person thought. Her striking conclusion is that ‘I’ does not refer. Evans (1982) rejects this conclusion, and this is because he thinks that what is normally required for reference to an object *is* also present in many first-person thoughts. He therefore abandons what Anscombe takes to be an important feature of ‘I’ and first-person thoughts – that if ‘I’ refers, it cannot fail to refer. Evans accepts that in some cases where what is required for singular reference is lacking, a subject’s first-person thoughts can fail to refer to an object.

The position advanced in this thesis is that Anscombe is right that what is normally required for reference is lacking in first-person thoughts. However, she is wrong that this entails that a subject’s first-person thoughts do not refer. When a subject refers first-personally in some kinds of first-person thoughts – thoughts which in this thesis will be termed *subjective first-person thoughts* – the grounds for his thought do not involve his acquaintance with himself. The experiences

which ground such first-person thoughts are from the first-person perspective, or from 'the inside'. The subject can self-ascribe such experiences, referring to himself reflexively.

But not all first-person thoughts are as a result of a subject having experiences from the first-person perspective. As Evans points out:

It is vital to remember this feature of our thought about ourselves. 'I'-thoughts are not, as is sometimes suggested, restricted to thoughts about states of affairs 'from the point of view of the subject'. (Evans (1982), p209-10)

In Chapter 1, subjective first-person thoughts – those which have grounds from the first-person perspective – are distinguished from objective first-person thoughts, which are not so grounded. It is also argued that objective first-person thoughts can be further divided, into those which are, and those which are not, immune to error through misidentification.<sup>1</sup> The distinction between subjective and objective first-person thought is important because in Part III it is argued that a subject can refer to himself first-personally without acquaintance because he has subjective first-person thoughts. Reference is possible in objective first-person thoughts because a subject can refer in subjective first-person thoughts.

In Chapter 2, some of the existing accounts of first-person reference are considered. These focus predominantly on the content of first-person statements, and on how such statements differ in content from statements about the subject which are not first-personal. For instance, Perry ((1977/2000), p17) gives an example of a subject Lingens who is an amnesiac.<sup>2</sup> He is reading a biography of himself, but does not realize he is reading about himself. Perhaps the biography states that Lingens is the cousin of a spy. Lingens is prepared to assert 'Lingens is the cousin of a spy', but not the first-personal 'I am the cousin of a spy'. What is the difference when he thinks first-personally, as opposed to merely thinking about himself? How does he think first-personally?

Castañeda (1967, 1968) and Perry (1977, 1979) have argued convincingly that when a subject thinks and expresses a first-person thought this is not equivalent to his thinking a descriptive thought. I think that this is right – when a subject

<sup>1</sup> Immunity to error through misidentification will be explained in Chapter 1, Section 2.1

<sup>2</sup> The name 'Lingens' is taken from Frege (1918)

thinks first-personally he is thinking about an object, himself. But still the question remains: how is it that he thinks about himself first-personally? How does he refer to himself? Does this differ from how he is able to refer to other objects? In Chapter 2, Lewis's account of first-person thought in 'Attitudes *De Dicto* and *De Se*' (1979) is considered. If this account is correct it has the result that the content of a subject's first-person thought is structurally very different to the content of his thoughts about other objects. But, for reasons which will be explained, I do not think that Lewis's account can be correct. A Fregean can also explain the data that a subject's first-person thought is distinct from his non-first-personal thought about himself. And his explanation does not have the consequence that the structure of the content of first-personal thought differs from the structure of the content of his thought about other objects. But most Fregeans would also think that a subject's reference in first-personal cases is achieved in basically the same way as his reference to independent objects.

To understand why this is wrong – why it is that first-person reference is distinct from other singular reference – it is necessary to understand what is required for a subject to be able to refer to other objects. Only when this is understood can one see why what is normally necessary for reference is not required in the first-person case. Part II of this thesis explores what it is for a subject to have a thought about a particular object. It is argued that to have a singular thought about an independent object – to refer to a particular object which is independent of the subject – the subject must be acquainted with the object. The claim is not that a subject's acquaintance with an object fully explains how a subject can think about the object. Instead it is that acquaintance with an object is a necessary condition for a subject's thought to be about an object. Without being acquainted with the object the subject is not in a position to think about it. Acquaintance is not required in subjective first-person thought as the subject is already in a position to think about himself, the subject of thought.

The phrases 'referring to an object' and 'referring to an object in thought' are used frequently in this thesis. By 'referring to an object in thought' I mean that a subject has a singular thought about an object – he is thinking about a particular object. Some (e.g. Bach (1987)) dispute that singular thought is a kind of mental

reference. This is because they understand referring as something that speakers do. On this view, a speaker uses a word to refer an audience to an object he is already thinking of. Understood in this way, a subject's thinking of an object is necessary for his referring to that object. Thus it makes no sense to understand thinking of an object as referring to it in thought. In this thesis, reference is not understood in this way. A subject can refer in language, but he can also refer in thought; this is mental reference, or singular thought. As Sainsbury (2007) writes:

Thought precedes language, and can occur in creatures which are not, and never will be, language users. Mental reference precedes linguistic reference, and can occur in creatures which are not, and never will be, language users. Pre-linguistic humans refer to things in thought, and this capacity helps them acquire linguistic skills. (Sainsbury (2007), p216)

Sometimes a subject refers in thought by using language – speaking ‘internally’. He may, in such cases, be able to think of objects which he would not be able to think of without language. But being able to think of, and refer to, an object, need not always involve language.

When a subject has a singular thought, or refers to an object in thought, he is thinking about a particular object. Singular thought is to be contrasted with general or descriptive thought. If I think about this keyboard I am typing on I am thinking about this particular object in front of me. I am not thinking about whatever happens to fulfil a certain description; I am not thinking, for instance, about whatever happens to be black, with white letters of the alphabet on its keys. I could think about this keyboard and be mistaken about some of its properties – perhaps it is not black at all, and I only think it is because of a trick of the light. Whether or not my thought that this keyboard is black is true depends on how things are with this particular keyboard. I cannot have the same thought about a different keyboard, even one that looks the same. This is not the case with descriptive thoughts. I may think that the shortest spy has blond hair. If this is a descriptive thought, rather than a thought about a particular person, then it is about whoever fulfils the condition of being the shortest spy. This may be about a different person if the situation were different, but the thought remains the same.

Chapter 3 focuses primarily on the work of Russell from 1903 until 1919. The principle that to think about an object one must be acquainted with it is most commonly associated with Russell. But Russell claims far more for acquaintance than is claimed in this thesis. For Russell, not only does a subject's acquaintance with an object enable him to think about it, but it is the very things with which the subject is acquainted which are combined in thought. This latter role of acquaintance is rejected in this thesis. However, Russell's basic understanding of acquaintance is the following:

I think that the relation of subject and object which I call acquaintance is simply the converse of the relation of object and subject which constitutes presentation. (Russell (1911), p200-01)

In Chapter 4, this notion of acquaintance is developed. Acquaintance, as employed in this thesis, does not involve discriminating knowledge, or a subject's knowing which object he is thinking of. Instead, it is more like Evans's notion of *information* as used in *The Varieties of Reference* (1982). Purported counterexamples to an acquaintance restriction on singular thought are also considered – none of these is found to be a case of singular thought without acquaintance.<sup>3</sup> Chapters 5 and 6 continue to explore the notion of acquaintance and the consequences of such a restriction on thought. In Chapter 6 it is argued that because acquaintance restricts the thoughts a subject is able to have, the content of a subject's thought cannot be represented by a set of possible worlds.

A subject's acquaintance with an independent object is necessary for him to have a singular thought about that object. By being acquainted with the object he is in a position to think about it – it is this which makes his thought about one object rather than another. But this is not required for first-person thoughts because the subject is the object of thought. In Part III of this thesis first-person reference without acquaintance is explained. When a subject thinks certain first-person thoughts – subjective first-person thoughts – the grounds for his thoughts are from the first-person perspective. For instance, when a subject thinks what he would express by 'I am sitting down' or 'I am tired' what grounds this thought is the experience of sitting down, or the experience of being tired. These experiences are from the inside. But there is no object present in the experience

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<sup>3</sup> In this thesis I do not consider how a subject thinks about abstract objects. Abstract objects pose special problems of their own. The claim is that to refer to an independent concrete object the subject must be acquainted with it.

which puts the subject in a position to think about it – the subject is not acquainted with himself in such experiences. It is instead the fact that the subject is undergoing these experiences which enables him to refer to himself. He is the subject of the experience, and can ascribe the experience to himself.

Chapter 7 considers the worry that there is something circular in this account. What does it mean to say that a subject refers to himself? Can this only be explained in terms of the first person? Anscombe (1975) has argued that the token-reflexive rule – the rule that a subject uses ‘I’ to refer to himself – is circular. She thinks that ‘himself’, if explaining how a subject refers first-personally, can only be explained in terms of ‘I’. In Chapter 7 of this thesis it is argued that this is not the case. The reason why Anscombe thinks it circular is because she assumes that what is necessary for a subject’s reference to independent objects is also necessary for his reference in first-person thoughts. But the main purpose of this thesis is to argue against this. Once one accepts that a subject’s reference in first-person thought is distinct from his reference to independent objects the argument that the token-reflexive rule is circular does not go through. In this chapter the position developed in this thesis is also contrasted with Rumfitt’s (1994) interpretation of the token-reflexive rule.

It is probably worth reiterating at this point that this thesis is about how a subject is able to *think* first-personally. It is about how his reference in first-person thought is distinct from his reference in other singular thoughts. Although such thoughts are primarily expressed by ‘I’<sup>4</sup>, this thesis is not about the meaning of the word ‘I’. A subject, understanding the token-reflexive rule, can use ‘I’ to refer to himself in thought. He does not need to be acquainted with himself in order to do this. But this thesis does not have anything to say about what ‘I’, written down on a piece of paper, or recorded in a message, might mean. There has been some debate about this: whether ‘I’ refers to the producer or the user of the term, whether it depends on the intentions of the producer or user, or on pragmatic conventions.<sup>5</sup> This thesis is not concerned with such matters; it is concerned with how a subject thinks first-personally about himself.

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<sup>4</sup> Or by other first-person terms or verbal inflections in other languages

<sup>5</sup> For instance, see Sidelle (1991), Predelli (1998a&b) and Corazza, Fish, and Gorvett (2002)



The final chapter develops the notion of the first-person perspective. The claim is that because a subject has experiences from this perspective he can refer reflexively. The objection that it is precisely in having such experiences from the first-person perspective that a subject is acquainted with himself is considered and rejected. These experiences do not put the subject in contact with an object so that he can refer to it. They are experiences of the subject, who can ascribe such experiences to himself. This chapter also returns to Anscombe's initial position – that if what is normally required for successful reference to objects is not present in the case of first-person thought, a subject's first-person thoughts do not refer to an object. The position in this thesis is that such thoughts do refer to an object – the subject himself – and that the subject is an object in the world, among other objects. Chapter 8 explores how, on the picture of first-person reference developed here, this can be so. Subjective first-person thought – first-person thought based on grounds from the first-person perspective – is fundamental. Because a subject can refer unproblematically to himself in subjective first-person thoughts, he can also refer to himself in objective first-person thoughts. And it is because he, the subject, is acquainted with other objects in the world, that he can refer to them.

## **Part I**

### **First-Person Thought**

## Chapter 1

### The Varieties of First-Person Thought

#### 1 The Problem of First-Person Thought

Our questions were a combined *reductio ad absurdum* of the idea of 'I' as a word whose role is to 'make a singular reference'. I mean the questions how one is guaranteed to get the object right, whether one may safely assume no unnoticed substitution, whether one could refer to oneself 'in absence', and so on. The suggestion of getting the object right collapses into absurdity when we work it out and try to describe how getting hold of the wrong object may be excluded.

.....

Getting hold of the wrong object *is* excluded, and that makes us think that getting hold of the right object is guaranteed. But the reason is that there is no getting hold of an object at all. With names, or denoting expressions... there are two things to grasp: the kind of use, and what to apply them to from time to time. With 'I' there is only the use. (Anscombe (1975), p147)

In Anscombe's comments towards the end of her article 'The First Person' (1975), we find her startling claim that 'I' is not a referring expression. One reason she thinks this is because she believes that there is nothing which can explain how a subject's mind "latches on to" the object which he is, so enabling him to refer to an object by his use of the term 'I' (e.g. p137, p142). In her article Anscombe considers how singular terms such as names and demonstratives refer to objects, and how a subject using such terms must think about the objects. Her conclusion is that what is necessary for singular reference is lacking in the cases where subjects express thoughts with the first-person.

Anscombe is not alone in thinking that what is normally required for reference is lacking in first-person thought. Although Strawson (1959, 1966) thinks that 'I' does refer, he thinks this because it comes from the mouth of an empirically identifiable person. But if a subject's first-personal thoughts were not linked with communication in this way then there would be no referring use for 'I'. This is because the way in which a subject thinks first-personally is not the same as the way in which he thinks of other objects:

...how can it be right to talk of *ascribing* in the case of oneself? For surely there can be a question of ascribing only if there is or could be a

question of identifying that to which the ascription is made; and though there may be a question of identifying the one who is in pain when that one is another, how can there be such a question when that one is oneself? But this query answers itself as soon as we remember that we *speak* primarily to others, for the information of others. In one sense, indeed, there is no question of my having to *tell who it is* who is in pain, when I am. In another sense, however, I may have to *tell who it is*, i.e. to let others know who it is. (Strawson (1959), p100)

Even many who reject Anscombe's conclusion that 'I' does not refer accept her assumption that if what is normally required for successful reference were lacking, then a subject's first-person thoughts would fail to refer. Thus Evans (1982) admits that in a case where a subject is, and always has been, a brain in a vat, subject to various hallucinations, what is normally required for successful reference is lacking. Because it is lacking, the subject's first-person thoughts cannot refer ((1982), p250-1). But usually, Evans contends, what is required for successful singular thought is also present in some first-person thoughts, and it is because of this that a subject's first-person thoughts refer. Because he assimilates first-person reference to other singular reference, Evans gives up what Anscombe takes to be a key feature of first-person thought: that if it refers, it is guaranteed to refer.

In this thesis it is argued that Anscombe, against Evans, is right. What is normally required for successful singular reference need not be present when a subject thinks first-personal thoughts. There need be no 'getting hold of an object' to think first-personally in the same way that one must 'get hold of an object' to refer non-first-personally to an object. But from this correct observation Anscombe draws the invalid conclusion that 'I' does not refer. Both she and Evans make the mistaken assumption that what is required for reference in the first-person case must be similar to what is required for a subject to be able to think about and refer to independent objects.

The proposal in this thesis is that what is normally required for a subject to think about and refer to an object is that he is acquainted with the object. It is being acquainted with an object that puts the subject in a position to think about that object. This enables him to have a singular thought about *that* object, rather than another. It enables him to have a singular thought about that object, rather than a

descriptive thought which happens to denote an object. But a subject can think about himself very easily because he is the subject of his first-person thoughts. 'I' can refer to an object very easily, precisely because the subject thinking a first-personal thought expressed by 'I' is also the object of the thought. A subject's acquaintance with himself is not needed to put him in a position to think about himself. To think that it is, as Evans does, is to misunderstand the nature of first-person thought, and to misunderstand the role that acquaintance, in a subject's singular thoughts about other objects, is playing. Reference in first-person thought is distinct from reference in other thoughts about objects.

Anscombe gets it almost right when she writes:

But 'I' is not a name: these 'I'-thoughts are examples of reflective consciousness of states, actions, motions, etc... These 'I'-thoughts (allow me to pause and think some!) ... are unmediated conceptions (knowledge or belief, true or false) of states, motions, etc., of this object here... (Anscombe (1975), p151)

She continues at the end of her article, when discussing a subject who is not thinking first-personally:

He did not have what I call 'unmediated agent-or-patient conceptions of actions, happenings, and states'. These conceptions are subjectless. That is, they do not involve the connection of what is understood by a predicate with a distinctly conceived subject. (Anscombe (1975), p153)

Anscombe is right that when a subject thinks some first-personal thoughts what is experienced does not involve a distinctly conceived subject. But such unstructured experiences, unstructured 'actions, happenings, and states', are what ground many of a subject's first-person thoughts. By experiencing these from the first-person perspective – by undergoing the experiences – he can refer to himself. He can refer to himself reflexively.<sup>1</sup>

But such thoughts – where the grounds are from the first-person perspective – are not the only kind of first-person thoughts. There are also first-person thoughts where the grounds, if there are any grounds, are not from the first-person perspective. To fully understand first-person thought, and how a subject is able to refer to himself first-personally, a distinction must be made between subjective and objective first-person thought.

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<sup>1</sup> This is explained further in Chapter 7

## 2 Subjective and Objective First-Person Thought

Wittgenstein describes two different uses of the word 'I':

There are two different cases in the use of the word 'I' (or 'my') which I might call 'the use as object' and 'the use as subject'. Examples of the first kind of use are these: 'My arm is broken', 'I have grown six inches', 'I have a bump on my forehead', 'The wind blows my hair about'. Examples of the second kind are: 'I see so-and-so', 'I hear so-and-so', 'I try to lift my arm', 'I think it will rain', 'I have a toothache'. One can point to the difference between these two categories by saying: The cases of the first category involve the recognition of a particular person, and there is in these cases the possibility of an error, or as I should rather put it: The possibility of an error has been provided for....It is possible that, say in an accident, I should feel a pain in my arm, see a broken arm at my side, and think it is mine, when really it is my neighbour's. And I could, looking into a mirror, mistake a bump on his forehead for one on mine. On the other hand there is no question of recognizing a person when I say I have toothache. To ask 'are you sure that it's *you* who have pains?' would be nonsensical...And now this way of stating our idea suggests itself: that it is impossible that in making the statement 'I have a toothache' I should have mistaken another person for myself, as it is to moan with pain by mistake, having mistaken someone else for me. To say, 'I have pain' is no more a statement *about* a particular person than moaning is. (Wittgenstein (1958), p66-7)

Although it is disputed exactly where the line should be drawn – Evans, for instance, thinks that 'The wind is blowing my hair about' is a case of the use of 'I' as subject, when this is known in a first-personal way (e.g. (Evans (1982), p218) – it is generally agreed, following Shoemaker (1968), that in cases where 'I' is used as subject, such judgements are immune to error through misidentification,<sup>2</sup> and where 'I' is used as object they are not.

I think that there is an important distinction between thoughts which can be expressed with 'I' as subject and with 'I' as object; thoughts I will term 'subjective first-person thoughts' and 'objective first-person thoughts' respectively. However, this distinction is not marked by whether or not such thoughts are immune to error through misidentification. There certainly are cases of objective first-person thoughts where these thoughts are subject to errors of misidentification. But there is also an important class of cases where a subject thinks of himself objectively, and yet such thoughts are not subject to errors of misidentification. The category of objective first-person thought should

<sup>2</sup> Immunity to error through misidentification is explained in Section 2.1 below.

be divided into two – of those that are, and those that are not, immune to error through misidentification.

All subjective first-person thoughts are immune to error through misidentification, but this is not the defining characteristic of the class. Instead, it is that such thoughts have an *internal aspect* – they are from the ‘inside’ or from the first-person perspective. Objective first-person thoughts do not share this first-person perspective – they are not from the ‘inside’. But nevertheless, the subject is thinking first-personally and is referring to himself.

I disagree with Wittgenstein, who suggests that when ‘I’ is used as subject it does not refer:

To say, ‘I have pain’ is no more a statement *about* a particular person than moaning is. (Wittgenstein (1958), p67)

Unlike Wittgenstein, I think that subjective first-person thoughts are the central cases of where a subject refers to himself first-personally. It is because a subject can refer to himself in his subjective first-person thoughts that he can refer in his objective first-person thoughts. How a subject refers first-personally to himself both subjectively and objectively is explored in Part III of this thesis. In the rest of this chapter I explain in what I take the distinction between subjective and objective first-person thought to consist, and explain the further subdivision within the category of objective first-person thought.

## 2.1 Immunity to Error through Misidentification<sup>3</sup>

When a subject’s thought that *a is F* is as a result of his thought that *b is F* and *a=b*, then such a thought is based on an identification – the subject’s thought that object *a* is identical to object *b*. This identification may be mistaken. For instance, the subject may perceive a woman wearing a red coat. He identifies the woman he sees as Mary and comes to think that Mary is wearing a red coat. This thought is based on an identification – that Mary is that woman (the woman he perceives) – and so as such may be subject to an identification error. He may be wrong in identifying Mary as that woman. If he is wrong in identifying Mary as that woman, the subject’s thought that Mary is wearing a red coat is still about

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<sup>3</sup> For further discussion see Shoemaker (1968), Evans (1982, Chapter 6 and 7), Pryor (1999) and Campbell (1999), among others.

Mary; he is able to think about and refer to Mary.<sup>4</sup> But his thought that Mary is wearing a red coat is based on a mistaken identification of Mary with the woman he perceives, and so his belief about Mary is mistaken.

Pryor (1999) argues that there is another way in which a subject's thought may be subject to a misidentification error. In this second kind of case the subject does not make a mistake identifying objects *a* and *b*, so thinking that the wrong thing is *F*. Instead he makes a mistake working out what thing is *F* in the first place. He has reason to believe that  $\exists xFx$  and goes wrong in thinking *a* is *F*. Pryor gives the example of smelling a skunky smell in his garden. He sees a small animal, and thinks what he would express by 'That is a skunk in my garden'. But he is mistaken. The small animal he singles out is not a skunk, although there is a skunk in his garden.

There are supposed to be some thoughts which are immune to such errors – such thoughts are said to be *immune to errors of misidentification*. For instance, a subject's thought expressed by the sentence 'that woman is wearing a red coat', formed on the basis of perceiving the woman, is immune to error through misidentification. The subject may be mistaken about the colour of the coat, or whether she is wearing a coat at all, but he has not misidentified the woman, as his thought is not based on an identity assumption. If a thought is immune to error through misidentification then it is not based on an identity assumption; it is, as Evans (1982) terms it 'identification-free'. Evans proposes that there is a test for whether a thought is identification-free:

What we should say is that a judgement is identification-free if it is based upon a way of knowing about objects such that it does not make sense for the subject to utter 'Something is *F*, but is it *a* that is *F*?', when the first component expresses knowledge which the subject does not think he has, or may have, gained in any other way. (Evans (1982), p189-90)<sup>5</sup>

It is important to realize that what make a thought immune to error through misidentification are the grounds on which it is based. A subject's thought that he would express by 'That man is sunburnt', which is grounded in his perception of a man with a bright red face, is identification-free and immune to error

<sup>4</sup> Perhaps he knows Mary personally, and because of this is able to think of and refer to her.

<sup>5</sup> This is a modified version of a test proposed by Shoemaker (1968), p82



through misidentification. It is not based on an identity judgement of *that man* with anyone else, or on his grounds for thinking that someone is sunburnt, and then identifying *that man* as the person who fulfils this condition. But his thought that 'That man is sunburnt', based on his belief that that man is Bill, and his knowledge that Bill is sunburnt, is not immune to error through misidentification. It is based on his identification of that man with Bill. If he is wrong that that man is Bill, he still refers to that man in thought, but has a mistaken belief about him that he is sunburnt.

## 2.2 Subjective First-Person Thought

Wittgenstein's examples of the use of 'I' as subject are generally considered to be cases where the judgements expressed are immune to error through misidentification. When a subject thinks '*I* see so-and-so' or '*I* hear so-and-so' or '*I* think it will rain', it does not make sense for him to say 'Someone sees so-and-so, but is it me?', 'Someone hears so-and-so, but do I hear so-and-so?', 'Someone thinks it will rain, but do I think it will rain?'. The judgements that the subject has made do not seem based on his identification of himself with another object, or on his belief that something has a certain property, and then identifying the thing that has a certain property as himself. Shoemaker (1968, p81-2) points out that such first-person thoughts which are immune to error in this way need not be incorrigible. A subject may think what he would express by 'I see a canary'. He may be mistaken – there may be no canary in front of him – but he cannot have misidentified himself as the person he thinks can see a canary. Evans ((1982), p218-22) argues that first-person thoughts which are immune to error through misidentification are not limited to cases of mental self-ascription. Wittgenstein treats the example 'The wind is blowing my hair' as a case of the use of 'I' (in this case 'my') as object. Evans thinks this is wrong:

For it was this treatment which gave rise to the widespread belief that the phenomenon of immunity to error through misidentification, which is so central to the notion of self-consciousness, does not extend to self-ascription of physical properties. But of course it does. There is a way of knowing that the property of  $\xi$ 's hair being blown by the wind is currently instantiated, such that when the first component expresses knowledge gained in this way, the utterance 'The wind is blowing someone's hair, but it is my hair that the wind is blowing?' will not make sense. Wittgenstein's discussion does not take sufficient account of the fact that the property of being immune to error through misidentification is not one which applies to propositions *simpliciter*, but one which

applies only to judgements made upon this or that basis. Once we appreciate this relativity to a basis, which arguably must be taken into account in the case of mental self-ascription as well, the fact that there are cases involving the self-ascription of physical predicates in which 'the possibility of error has been provided for' will be seen not to impugn the fact that there are cases in which it just as clearly has not. (Evans (1982), p218-9)

The key point Evans wants to get across is that it is the *grounds* for making certain first-person judgements which make those judgements immune to error through misidentification. So a subject's thought expressed by 'The wind is blowing my hair about', if it is formed on the basis of the subject feeling his hair blowing about in a first-personal way, is not based on an identification. If he thinks it because he sees himself in a mirror with his hair blowing about, or if he sees his (long) hair out of the corner of his eye, then this thought is not immune to error – he may have mistaken someone else for himself. Likewise, his thoughts that 'I am sitting down' or 'I have my legs crossed', if based on an experience from the first-person perspective, will be immune to error through misidentification. But if such judgements are formed on another basis they will not be.<sup>6</sup>

It is this first-personal basis – experiences or grounds from the first-person perspective – which is crucial to first-person thoughts expressed with 'I' as subject. These are subjective first-person thoughts. We clearly do have thoughts which are based on a special first-person perspective – there is a first-personal way of knowing that one is sitting down, or that one is in pain. Such subjective first-person thoughts are also identification-free, but this is not what delimits the class.

This special first-person perspective, from the inside, has been illustrated by Williams in 'Imagination and the Self' (1966/1973). He argues (p38) that there are three ways in which a subject can imagine something. Firstly, he can imagine something without the subject being in the imagined world at all. Secondly, he can imagine the world from his perspective – from a first-person perspective. The subject imagines moving around the world, seeing things,

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<sup>6</sup> Although see Chapter 8, Section 1.1, for a discussion of whether such thoughts really are immune to error through misidentification where there is the possibility of deviant causal chains.

having various kinaesthetic experiences, and so on. Williams terms this second kind of imagination ‘participation imagination’. And thirdly, he can imagine, from the outside, a figure who is himself, doing something. As an example of the first case, the subject might just imagine a children’s playground; he imagines the swings, the climbing frame, the seesaw, and children playing on these things. In the second kind of participation imagining the subject imagines the playground from his perspective – he imagines what he sees and hears. He might imagine seeing the children on the swings, and hearing their laughter. He might imagine the slide in front, and the roundabout to the left. In the third kind of imagining, he imagines himself in the playground. He does not imagine the experience (e.g.) of helping a child down the slide, but instead imagines a person (who is himself) helping a child down the slide. This third kind of imagination can alternate with the second kind:

...if I am prone to fantasies of being a world champion racing driver, this could involve kinaesthetic imagery of tension, hands clasped on the steering wheel, and visualisation of wet tarmac as seen through an oil-spattered windscreen, and so forth; and, also at some different point, some visual image of myself, as though in a newspaper photograph, having a garland hung around my neck. (Williams, (1966/1973, p38)

It is the second kind of imagining – participation imagination – which captures the first-person perspective. In such cases, the subject imagines experiences – undergoing experiences, or experiences befalling him – of the kind which would warrant subjective first-person thoughts. If he imagines sitting down, he imagines the experience of sitting down, from the first-person perspective, or from the inside. If this experience were actual, rather than imagined, it would ground the thought ‘I am sitting down’. This is a subjective first-person thought, and involves the use of ‘I’ as subject.

Higginbotham, in ‘Remembering, Imagining, and the First Person’ (2003) also brings out the internal dimension of subjective first-person thoughts. He particularly considers cases of remembering and imagining, and suggests that reports of what I have termed ‘subjective first-person thoughts’ – those which are immune to error and have an ‘internal aspect’ can be captured by attributions

involving the understood subject PRO.<sup>7</sup> Thus he thinks even if I cannot play the piano I can imagine my playing *Three Blind Mice* on the piano. I can imagine it as an event I witness, from the ‘outside’. But I cannot imagine (PRO) playing *Three Blind Mice* on the piano as I cannot imagine it from the ‘inside’, as an action performed (see Higginbotham (2003), p509).

Higginbotham also gives an example where first-person memory is from the first-person perspective, and contrasts this with a first-person memory which is not from the inside. The former, but not the latter, can be attributed using PRO. He gives the following example:

Suppose that we form a small party, agreeing that we will call on John and encourage him to finish his thesis by July. Having cornered John, we explain how he should really be prudent given his scholastic and financial circumstances, and so forth. After the session, I try to remember whether we merely hinted around the subject, or whether it was explicitly said to John that he should finish his thesis by July. After a time, I might remember someone saying to John that he should finish his thesis by July; but I don’t remember whether it was I who said it. Your memory for the occasion is better than mine, and you do remember my saying it, and you tell me so. I draw an inference as follows:

- (1) I remember someone saying John should finish his thesis by July;  
In fact, as I am now assured, it was I who said it; therefore,  
I remember my saying John should finish his thesis by July.

The reasoning seems to me to be impeccable. But (2) does not follow from the premisses of (1), and is indeed obviously false:

- (2) I remember saying John should finish his thesis by July  
However, the only difference between (2) and the true conclusion of (1) is that the first-person pronoun has been replaced by PRO.  
(Higginbotham (2003), p508; my numbering)

The conclusion of (1) is not immune to errors of misidentification in Pryor’s second sense. I remember that someone said that John should finish his thesis by July, and then identify myself as this person. Hence I may be mistaken that it was I who said it. But (2) is not subject to such an error. If I remember saying John should finish his thesis by July it does not make sense to wonder ‘Someone said John should finish his thesis by July, but did I say John should finish his thesis by July?’.<sup>8</sup> I remember this from the inside, as an act performed. Both the memory of my saying John should finish his thesis by July, and the memory of

<sup>7</sup> Higginbotham follows Chomsky (1981) in taking PRO to have an interpretation necessarily anaphoric to the main clause subject, but no phonetic realization.

<sup>8</sup> Some may think that it does make sense to ask this, because of the possibility of quasi-memory. For a discussion of quasi-memory see Chapter 8, Section 1.2, of this thesis.

saying John should finish his thesis by July ground the thought expressed by ‘I said John should finish his thesis by July’. But if it is grounded by my hearing my voice hanging in the air, it is not immune to error through misidentification and is not from the inside. Whereas if it is grounded by my remembering saying John should finish his thesis by July, these grounds are from the inside, and this is a subjective first-person thought.

The phenomenon of subjective first-person thought occurs in many places. A subject may anticipate things happening from the first-person perspective. He may want, hope or expect to do certain things; these desires, hopes and expectations being from the inside. He may intend to do something in the future. If he intends to do something in the future then he represents the intended action from his own point of view. For instance, he may intend to mow the lawn. This entails representing mowing the lawn from the inside, from his own perspective. The point of this intention is to be acted on, and it can be acted on by the subject only if it is from his first-person perspective.<sup>9</sup> His thought based on these grounds, expressed by ‘I will mow the lawn’ is a subjective first-person thought.

Thoughts which are expressed with ‘I’ as subject are subjective first-person thoughts. They are immune to error through misidentification, and the experiences (or memories, etc.) which ground them are from the first-person perspective. It is this latter fact, the internal, first-person perspective, which makes them subjective first-person thoughts.

### **2.3 Objective First-Person Thought**

Subjective first-person thought is to be contrasted with objective first-person thought. Objective first-person thoughts are first-person thoughts which are not subjective. The grounds for them, if they have grounds, are not from the first-person perspective; they are not from the inside.

Objective first-person thoughts are still first-personal. They must not be confused with a subject’s non-first-personal thoughts about himself. For instance, Perry’s (1977) amnesiac Lingens, who reads about himself in a book,

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<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of intention along these lines see Velleman (1996) p70-1

may come to have the thought he would express by ‘Lingens is the cousin of a spy’. This is a non-first-personal thought about himself. It is not an objective first-person thought. When Lingens comes to believe ‘I am the cousin of a spy’, this is an objective first-person thought. It is a first-person thought, but is not based on grounds from the first-person perspective.

Wittgenstein seems to assume that where there is no ‘internal dimension’ to a first-person thought, the thought is subject to errors of identification. He says “the possibility of an error has been provided for” because such thoughts “involve the recognition of a particular person.” As examples of the use of ‘I’ as object, Wittgenstein gives ‘I have a bump on my forehead’, or ‘My arm is broken’. He thinks that a subject might look in the mirror, and see a person with a bump on his forehead, when that person is not really himself. Or he might see a broken arm at his side, when really this arm belongs to someone else. To what does Wittgenstein take ‘I’ as object to refer? Does he take it to refer to the particular person being recognized? If so, if I see myself in the mirror, and have not made an error of identification, then perhaps ‘I’ refers to *this body*. But what happens in a case where an error is made? If I mistake a bump on my neighbour’s forehead for one on my own, am I referring to my neighbour with my use of ‘I’ as object? This seems implausible. It is more likely that I am still supposed to be referring to *this body*, as in my body, and I have mistakenly identified this body with my neighbour’s body. But if this is the case, how do I refer to *this body*?

I think that in such cases, when the subject says ‘I have a bump on my head’, or ‘My arm is broken’, he is still referring to himself, first-personally; he is referring to the same object he refers to when he thinks subjective first-person thoughts.<sup>10</sup> This option is obviously not open to Wittgenstein, who suggests that ‘I’ as subject does not refer. But we both agree that the basis on which the subject makes his judgement could be based on a mistaken identification – with himself and that man in the mirror, or himself and the person whose arm is by his side.<sup>11</sup> Even if he does not mistake someone else for himself, his judgement

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<sup>10</sup> This will be developed in Chapter 8

<sup>11</sup> Clearly we might disagree over what ‘himself’ as object refers to here, or at least over how it refers.

seems based on an identification. His grounds for his judgement are not from the 'inside' and they are subject to identification errors.

Similarly, Higginbotham's example of when I remember *my* saying to John that he should finish his thesis by July, based on my remembering a voice hanging in the air and identifying that voice as mine, lacks both an internal dimension and is based on an identification. The thought, expressed by 'I said to John he should finish his thesis by July', if based on such grounds, is an objective first-person thought. It is not immune to error through misidentification.

There are many cases of objective first-person thoughts which are not immune to error through misidentification, and are not based on first-personal grounds. Perry's example of the amnesiac Lingens, reading about himself in a book, who finally realizes what he would express by 'I am the cousin of a spy' seems, on the surface, to be such a case.<sup>12</sup> His thought is based on the grounds that he knows that Lingens is the cousin a spy, and he has come to identify himself as Lingens. Such a thought does not seem to be identification-free.

But these are not the only cases where a subject has objective first-person thoughts. As Evans (1982) points out, there are many cases where a subject thinks first-person thoughts for which he has no grounds:

...we are perfectly capable of grasping propositions about ourselves which we are quite incapable of deciding, or even offering grounds for. I can grasp the thought that I was breast-fed, for example or that I was unhappy on my first birthday, or that I tossed and turned in my sleep last night, or that I shall be dragged unconscious through the streets of Chicago, or that I shall die. (Evans (1982), p208-9)

The thought that I was breast-fed, for instance, *may* be based on an identification; perhaps I see a photo of a baby being breast-fed and base my judgement on the identity assumption expressed by 'I am that baby'. But equally, I may have no grounds for the thought; it may be an idle speculation. If this is the case, this seems to involve ascribing the property of being breast-fed to myself, thought of first-personally, whatever this may mean. This is not based on an identification. It also seems immune to errors of misidentification. It does not make sense to

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<sup>12</sup> See Chapter 2 for a discussion of whether statements such as 'I am Lingens' are identity statements.

ask ‘Someone was breast-fed, but was it I?’. Such thoughts are first-personal and immune to error through misidentification, yet they are not from the first-person perspective. They are objective first-person thoughts which are immune to identification error.

Objective first-person thoughts which are immune to error through misidentification can be extended to cases in imagination. Recall Williams (1966/1973) distinguishes between participation imagination – where a subject imagines an experience from the inside – and a third kind of imagination, where he imagines someone who is himself, doing something. One way he might imagine himself from the outside is non-first-personal. For instance, the subject may perceive himself in the mirror, dressed up as a fairy. He may imagine that fairy flying through space. But there is also a way that a subject can imagine himself objectively, by stipulating that a certain object is himself, labelling it as himself. The subject does not imagine the experience from the first-person perspective, but it is not like non-first-personal imagination either. He cannot be mistaken that he is thinking about himself. He imagines himself, from the outside. Such a case of objective first-personal imagination, like subjective, is immune to error through misidentification – the wrong object cannot be picked out, because the object imagined is stipulated to be himself.

Martin has suggested<sup>13</sup> that the phenomenon here termed objective first-person thought is also present in intention. As Higginbotham puts it:

There is, for instance, a difference in the intentions I may have when I intend to stop smoking (i.e. PRO to stop smoking), and when I intend merely that I should stop smoking. The latter intention might be fulfilled, say, by paying someone forcibly to remove cigarettes from my person whenever I am caught with them; but that is not fulfillment of an intention to stop smoking, which can only be done through willful refusal to put a cigarette to my lips and light up. (Higginbotham (2003), p509)

The former intention is one from the inside. It is framed from the first-person perspective. But the latter is not – there is no agency implied. I may intend that I should stop smoking in the same way that I might intend that John should stop smoking. Intending that I should stop smoking may be a case where the intention is non-first-personal. I may intend that the person in the mirror should

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<sup>13</sup> Martin’s response to an earlier version of Higginbotham’s paper is discussed in Higginbotham (2003)



stop smoking because they look so awful, but not realize that that person is myself. But it can also be a first-person intention; an intention from the 'outside'. But if this is the case it does not seem that I can be mistaken about the object of my intention here – it is not based on an identification. I have stipulated that the object of my intention is myself, from the outside. Such cases are probably very rare, but not impossible.

## 2.4 Conclusions

The distinction between subjective and objective first-person thought is important, as it is because a subject can have subjective first-person thoughts that he is able to refer to himself, the subject. He is able to have singular thoughts about himself. How this is possible will be explained in Part III. And because the subject can think about himself first-personally, he is also able to have objective first-person thoughts, where such thoughts do not have first-personal grounds. Objective first-person thoughts sometimes have no grounds. But some of them do have grounds which seem based on an identification. There is a subclass of objective first-person thought which is not immune to error through misidentification. The identification seems to be of the subject, thought of first-personally, with the subject, thought of in a different way; perhaps as that man in the mirror, that person being read about, etc. But is understanding this as an identity assumption really the best way to explain what is going on here? And if it is an identity assumption, does this mean that a subject must think of himself in a certain way when he thinks first-personally? These issues are considered in Chapter 2.

## Chapter 2

### The Structure of First-Person Thought

Writing in the nineteenth century, Mach describes a case where he has a thought about himself but does not have a first-person thought:

Not long ago, after a trying railway journey by night, when I was very tired, I got into an omnibus, just as another man appeared at the other end. 'What a shabby pedagogue that is, that has just entered', thought I. (Mach (1914), p4n)

Although Mach thinks a thought he would express by 'that man is a shabby pedagogue' he does not yet think first-personally what he would express by the sentence 'I am a shabby pedagogue'. This only happens later, when he realizes:

It was myself: opposite me hung a large mirror. The physiognomy of my class, accordingly, was better known to me than my own. ((1914), p4n)

There are many more examples in the literature which bring out the fact that a subject's thinking first-personally is not just the same as his thinking of himself. There is Castañeda's (1968) editor of *Soul* who knows that the editor of *Soul* is a millionaire, but does not think the first-personal thought he would express by 'I am a millionaire' (p440-41). Kaplan, in 'Demonstratives' (1989a, p533) discusses a subject who watches a man in a mirror with his pants on fire, but does not realize that that person is himself. He does not think first-personally what he would express by 'My pants are on fire'. Anscombe (1975) gives the example of John Smith, who does not know that he is John Horatio Auberon Smith, as named in a will, and so who refers to himself without knowing he is referring to himself; he thinks thoughts that would be expressed by 'John Horatio Auberon Smith is *F*' but not those that would be expressed by 'I am *F*' (p136-7). Perry also gives many examples where a subject thinks of himself, but does not think first-personally. For instance, in his early work, Perry (1977) describes amnesiac Lingens,<sup>1</sup> lost in Stanford library, reading all about a person called Lingens but not realizing that it is himself; he does not think the thought he would express by 'I am Lingens' (p17 in Perry (2000)). In his 'The Problem of the Essential Indexical' (1979) Perry gives the example of a shopper who follows a trail of sugar around a supermarket, trying to trace the shopper who is making a mess. He knows the shopper is making a mess, but he doesn't realize that the

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<sup>1</sup> The name Rudolf Lingens is taken from Frege (1918)

shopper is himself. It is only later that he realizes what he would express by ‘I am making a mess’ (p27 in Perry (2000)).

In some of these examples where a subject is thinking non-first-personally, the subject may have a descriptive thought which denotes himself. For example, Perry’s messy shopper knows that someone is making a mess, but does not know who satisfies this description.<sup>2</sup> However, in many of the examples, the subject is having a singular thought about himself, but is not thinking first-personally. In such cases he is thinking of himself in a way in which he normally thinks about independent objects. Mach, for instance, perceives someone; it happens to be his own reflection in the mirror. On the basis of this perception, he thinks what he would express by ‘That man is a shabby pedagogue’. Similarly with Kaplan’s example; the subject perceives a man with his pants on fire, and because of this thinks ‘That man has his pants on fire’. Anscombe’s John Horatio Auberon Smith example, and Perry’s Lingens example concern a subject reading about a named person. This is another way in which a subject can normally come to have singular thoughts about independent objects – on the basis of testimony. Because he hears or reads about these people, the subject is able to think about them. In these cases, the subject happens to be thinking about himself. But he is thinking about himself non-first-personally, rather than first-personally.

The proposal in this thesis is that in order to think non-first-personally of an object the subject must be acquainted with the object. This is taken to mean that in order to have a thought about an object, the object must somehow be present to the subject.<sup>3</sup> It is this that puts the subject in a position to be able to think of the object. But to be able to think first-personally, the subject does not need to be acquainted with himself. In this chapter, the focus will be on the cases above – the contrast between a subject’s first-person thought and his non-first-personal thought about himself. It is undeniable, I think, that there is a contrast here. But is this because what is involved in thinking about himself is fundamentally different in each case?

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<sup>2</sup> The shopper’s thought ‘I am making a mess’ is not immune to identification error in Pryor’s (1999) second sense. He has grounds for thinking that someone is making a mess and comes to conclude that he is making a mess. But he does not originally have a non-first-personal singular thought about himself. See Chapter 1, Section 2.1 for discussion.

<sup>3</sup> This understanding of acquaintance and the reasons for it will be discussed in detail in Part II.

In Chapter 1 a distinction was made between subjective and objective first-person thought. Subjective first-person thoughts are from the inside – their grounds are from the first-person perspective. A subject, Lingens, thinking what he would express by ‘I am sitting down’, or ‘I am hot’, where he comes to know this in a first-personal way, is thinking subjective first-person thoughts. He can have such thoughts even when amnesiac and lost. But suppose he reads in a book that Lingens is the cousin of a spy. He has the non-first-personal thought he would express by ‘Lingens is the cousin of a spy’, but he does not yet have the first-person thought he would express by ‘I am the cousin of a spy’. When he comes to think this, he now has an objective first-person thought. It is not based on grounds from the first-person perspective. It is not immune to error through misidentification – it makes sense for Lingens to say ‘Someone is the cousin of a spy, but is it I?’. When he is finally in the position to say ‘I am the cousin of a spy’ it seems that what he has learned is an informative identity; an identity he would express by ‘I am Lingens’.

In ‘Indexical Belief’ (1981), Stalnaker argues that statements such as ‘I am Lingens’ expressed by Lingens are indeed identity statements. There is not anything special about first-person thought. He argues that examples such as the amnesiac Lingens who does not think ‘I am Lingens’, or the man who does not realize ‘I am that man with his pants on fire’, are just the same as cases where the subject is ignorant about the identity of an independent object. These are cases where the subject thinks of the same object in two different ways, and does not appreciate that he is thinking of the same object. For example, a subject may think of the planet Venus in two different ways; as Hesperus (which he perceives in the evening sky), and as Phosphorus (which he perceives in the morning sky). He may rationally believe that Hesperus is a planet, but that Phosphorus is not. In the same way, so the thought goes, he may rationally believe that Lingens is the cousin of a spy (from reading about Lingens in a book) and not think first personally what he would express by ‘I am the cousin of a spy.’ As Stalnaker puts his proposal:

They are all cases that involve some kind of identity confusion, and all should be explained in the same way. ((1999), p19)

Yet Stalnaker later rejects this, saying:

This now seems to me at best misleading, and wrong if it implies that there is not a distinctive problem about indexical belief...((1999), p19)

His later proposal is now that Lingens's ignorance when he does not know 'I am Lingens' cannot be modelled in the same way as his ignorance that Hesperus is Phosphorus. It is not a case of identity confusion. Lewis, in '*Attitudes De Dicto and De Se*' (1979) reaches a similar conclusion. The content of the thought, expressed by Lingens as 'I am Lingens', is not structurally similar to the content of his thought that 'Hesperus is Phosphorus'.

In this chapter I begin by exploring Lewis's solution in '*Attitudes De Dicto and De Se*'. Is the thought 'I am Lingens', expressed by Lingens, an identity statement? If not, what is its content? Is the content of his belief 'I am the cousin of a spy' structurally distinct from the content of his belief 'Lingens is the cousin of a spy'? I conclude that Lewis's account cannot be quite right, and go on to explore accounts which treat statements such as 'I am Lingens' said by Lingens, as an informative identity statement. The accounts considered are a Fregean account, and Stalnaker's account in '*Indexical Belief*' (1981). Statements such as 'I am Lingens' said by Lingens, can be treated as informative identity statements, provided that one has a notion of content which is fine-grained enough. A Fregean notion of content is fine-grained enough. But accepting a Fregean notion of content does not mean that one needs to accept everything that Frege says about sense; one need not conclude that in order to think first-personally a subject must be present to himself in a special way.

## 1 Lewis's Proposal

Lewis, in '*Attitudes De Dicto and De Se*' (1979), proposes an account of what he calls '*attitudes de se*' which has the consequence that the content of a subject's first-person beliefs is structurally different from the content of his beliefs about other objects. He does not treat the amnesiac Lingens, coming to believe what he would state by 'I am Lingens', as his coming to learn an informative identity statement. He does not see it as parallel to a subject coming to learn that Hesperus is Phosphorus, for instance. Lewis, prior to '*Attitudes De Dicto and De Se*', takes the content of a belief to be a proposition, by which he means a set of possible worlds. Informative identity statements are true in all possible

worlds. Thus the belief that Hesperus is Phosphorus has the same content as the belief that Hesperus is Hesperus: the set of all possible worlds. This is something that a possible worlds account of thought content needs to be able to deal with.<sup>4</sup> But Lewis does not think that Lingens's statement 'I am Lingens' is an informative identity statement, and so does not address the issue of informative identity statements in his article:

I know perfectly well that there is such a thing as ignorance of noncontingent matters. I do not know what is the proper treatment of such ignorance; several very different strategies have been proposed. They depart to different degrees, and in different directions, from the assignment of sets of possible worlds as propositional objects. My hunch is that this problem cuts across the issues I want to discuss, so I shall ignore it. (Lewis (1979), p135)

Lewis's proposal is that when a subject has a first-person belief such as 'I am *F*', the content of this belief cannot be represented by a set of possible worlds. Instead such a belief is a relation between a subject and a property, rather than a proposition. The subject who thinks 'I am *F*' self-ascribes the property of *F*ness. The thoughts of two different subjects who both think 'I am *F*' will have the same content; both have the content of *being F*. If both Mary and Jane believe what they would express by saying 'I am sitting down' then they both self-ascribe the property of sitting down. When Lingens thinks first-personally 'I am the cousin of a spy', he self-ascribes the property of being the cousin of a spy. When he thinks 'I am Lingens' he self-ascribes the property of being Lingens.

Lewis also extends his account to explain what the content of a subject's singular thoughts must be. Lewis thinks that in order to have a singular thought or a *de re* belief about an object, the subject must be acquainted with the object. He discusses different examples where he thinks that it is uncontroversial that a subject can have a *de re* belief, or singular thought:

What have these cases in common? To put a name to it: a *relation of acquaintance*. [footnote omitted] To make it a little more precise: in each case, I and the one of whom I have beliefs *de re* are so related that there is an extensive causal dependence of my states upon his; and this causal dependence is of a sort apt for the reliable transmission of information.

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<sup>4</sup> See Section 3.1 below, for how Stalnaker (1981) deals with informative identity statements given an austere possible worlds account of content.

It is too much to require that information actually be reliably transmitted. In every case, a lot might go wrong and I might be very badly misinformed, and yet I could have beliefs *de re* – many of them wrong, perhaps – about the one to whom I bear a relation of acquaintance. (Lewis (1979), p155)

Lewis's proposal is that if a subject has a singular thought about an object, the content of this thought is given by the subject self-ascribing bearing a certain relation to the object which has a particular property. This relation between subject and the object thought about must involve acquaintance. For instance, if Lewis perceives his cat and thinks 'That cat is furry' he self-ascribes the property of looking at an object that is furry. The relation *looking at* is a relation of acquaintance. What happens when Lingens thinks non-first-personally 'Lingens is the cousin of a spy'? In this case he self-ascribes the property of reading about an object that is the cousin of a spy. *Reading about* is a relation of acquaintance. So this thought differs structurally from his first-person thought 'I am the cousin of a spy'. When he thinks first-personally 'I am the cousin of a spy' he self-ascribes the property of being the cousin of a spy.

Self-ascription of properties is ascription to oneself under the relation of identity. So one might think that first-person beliefs are not structurally distinct from non-first-personal beliefs. When Lingens thinks 'Lingens is the cousin of a spy' he self-ascribes the property of *reading about* an object that is the cousin of a spy, while when he thinks 'I am the cousin of a spy' he self-ascribes the property of *being identical to* an object that is the cousin of a spy'. Lewis thinks that identity is an acquaintance relation; indeed, he describes it as "a relation of acquaintance *par excellence*" ((1979), p156). But identity is not a relation of acquaintance, according to the notion of acquaintance developed in this thesis.<sup>5</sup> The object is not present to the subject just because the object and the subject are identical.<sup>6</sup> Lingens self-ascribing the property of being identical to an object that is the cousin of a spy collapses into Lingens self-ascribing the property of being the

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<sup>5</sup> See Part II

<sup>6</sup> The notion of acquaintance developed in this thesis is along the lines of Russell – that acquaintance between subject and object is the converse of the object being present to the subject. If identity fulfilled this requirement, Russell's agonising over whether the subject could be acquainted with himself makes little sense.

cousin of a spy. And this is distinct from his non-first-personal thought about himself.

Lewis's account can explain the difference between a subject's first-person thought, and his non-first-personal thought about himself. And this explanation involves acquaintance being a requirement for non-first-personal singular thoughts, and not for first-person thoughts. But there is a problem. The problem is not the difference between first-person and non-first-person thought. It is instead the distinction between subjective and objective first-person thought. Can Lewis's proposal account for this? The issue is not immediately apparent when cases of belief are considered. In first-person belief, a subject refers to himself first-personally, and ascribes a property to himself.<sup>7</sup> Whether or not this belief has grounds which are from the first-person perspective does not affect the content of the belief. When a subject believes what he would express by 'I am *F*', either subjectively or objectively, he self-ascribes the property of being *F*. But Lewis's account is supposed to extend to attitudes generally. His view is that the object of the attitude is a property, rather than a proposition. For instance, in discussing desire he says:

I suppose I might want to be a poached egg. (An ordinary poached egg – not an eggy creature that walks and talks.) Would I then want to inhabit one of the worlds where I am a poached egg? That's not it. I take it there are no such worlds. No poached egg is a counterpart of mine! If the object of my want is a proposition, it is the empty proposition. How could I want the empty proposition, in such a guise that I recognize it for what it is? But if the object is a property, it is nonempty. It is a property that plenty of poached eggs actually have. (Lewis (1979), p146)

If I want to be a poached egg, then I want the property of being a poached egg. Presumably if I intend to be a poached egg then I intend the property of being a poached egg. But if there can be subjective and objective first-person intentions, Lewis's account, as it stands, seems unable to deal with this. How can it distinguish between the intentions expressed by the sentences 'I intend to give up smoking' and 'I intend that I should give up smoking'. Both are first-personal, and yet if Higginbotham (2003) and Martin<sup>8</sup> are right, the latter need not involve an internal aspect.<sup>9</sup> Similarly in imagination. Can the contents of 'I imagine

<sup>7</sup> According to the proposal developed in this thesis, which takes both subjective and objective first-person thoughts to refer to an object.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Higginbotham (2003)

<sup>9</sup> See Chapter 1 for discussion.



playing *Three Blind Mice* on the piano' and 'I imagine myself playing *Three Blind Mice* on the piano' be distinguished? If I imagine the property of playing *Three Blind Mice*, this does not seem to capture the *objective* first-person interpretation. And yet if I imagine the property of *seeing* an object playing *Three Blind Mice*, although this captures the fact that the thought is objective, it does not capture the fact that it is *first-personal*.<sup>10</sup> On Lewis's account, when I refer to myself first-personally, what I am doing is identifying a perspective on the world. This cannot capture cases where there are objective first-person attitudes, not grounded in the first-person perspective.

In a related point, Lewis's account of first-person belief has the consequence that the subject disappears; again, it is only identifying a perspective on the world. The fact that Lingens's belief is about himself, Lingens, is not important. Lingens's belief that he would express by 'I am sitting down' is no different to Lewis's belief that he would express by the same sentence. But I think these two beliefs should be distinguished – they are each thinking of different objects. The accounts which I will now explore treat the first-person thought of Lingens and the first-person thought of Lewis as having different contents.

## 2 A Fregean Solution

The subject Lingens is amnesiac, and is reading all about a person called 'Lingens', but he does not realize he is reading about himself. He thinks what he would express by the sentence 'Lingens is the cousin of a spy', but not what he would express by 'I am the cousin of a spy'. He does not believe what he would express by 'I am Lingens'. A Fregean response to this example is to say a statement by Lingens of 'I am Lingens' is exactly what it appears to be – an informative identity statement. Before he comes to realize this identity, Lingens does not realize he is thinking of the same object when he thinks what he would express by 'Lingens is the cousin of a spy' and 'I am the cousin of a spy'. There are many other puzzle cases concerning identity confusion; it is not peculiar to first-person thought.

<sup>10</sup> To be fair to Lewis, he does admit that his account might not extend to some "ill-understood attitudes of imagining, conceiving, contemplating, or entertaining a thought." ((1979), p145)

Frege, in 'On *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*' (1892), proposes that a subject can hold differing cognitive attitudes to the sentences '*a* is *F*' and '*b* is *F*' even when '*a*' and '*b*' refer to the same object. For example, a subject might believe that Hesperus is a planet, yet disbelieve that Phosphorus is a planet, even though 'Hesperus' and 'Phosphorus' refer to the same object. Frege argues that we can explain this by saying that although '*a*' and '*b*' have the same reference – they refer to the same object – they do not express the same sense. So 'Hesperus' and 'Phosphorus' have the same reference – they both refer to the planet Venus – but they do not express the same sense. It is the sense of the term, not the reference, which is part of the *thought*, in Frege's terminology, or part of the content of the belief. When a subject has the belief that Hesperus is a planet he must grasp the sense of the term 'Hesperus'. When he has the belief that Phosphorus is a planet, he must grasp the sense of the term 'Phosphorus'. As these senses are different, the contents of the beliefs that Hesperus is a planet and that Phosphorous is a planet are different. And the content of 'Hesperus is Phosphorus' is not the same as the content of 'Hesperus is Hesperus'. It is possible for the subject to be unaware that Hesperus is Phosphorus, and come to learn this. It is not possible that he does not realize that Hesperus is Hesperus.

Frege describes the sense of a term as containing a 'mode of presentation' of an object:

It is natural, now, to think of there being connected with a sign (name, combination of words, written mark), besides that which the sign designates, which may be called the *Bedeutung* of the sign, also what I should like to call the *sense* of the sign, wherein the mode of presentation is contained. (Frege, (1892/1997), p152)

The object, the planet Venus, is presented in one way to the subject when he perceives it in the evening (and terms it 'Hesperus') and it is presented in a different way to the subject when he perceives it in the morning (and terms it 'Phosphorus'). Belief content is individuated by mode of presentation of an object.

Is this what is going on in the Lingens case? Is Lingens presented to himself in one way when he thinks first-personally, and in another way when he thinks of himself as Lingens? Frege suggests that this is the case. Just as 'Hesperus is a planet' and 'Phosphorus is a planet' have the same reference but express

different senses, so 'I am *F*' said by X, and 'X is *F*' have the same reference, but different senses. It is true that the word 'I' does not express a sense on its own; in this case it is 'I' said by X which expresses a particular sense. 'I' said by Y would express a different sense. But this is the case for any terms whose meaning is sensitive to context:

In all such cases the mere wording, as it can be preserved in writing, is not the complete expression of the thought; the knowledge of certain conditions accompanying the utterance, which are used as means of expressing the thought, is needed for us to grasp the thought correctly....The same utterance containing the word 'I' in the mouths of different men will express different thoughts of which some may be true, others false. (Frege (1918), p332 in Beaney (1997))

When the subject thinks that Lingens is the cousin of a spy, this is as a result of reading about Lingens in a book. He is learning about Lingens in this way; Lingens is presented to him in this way. But when Lingens thinks what he would express by 'I am the cousin of a spy', on Frege's view, Lingens is presented to himself in a different way. This is a special first-personal way. As Frege says, in discussing a subject Dr Lauben:

Now everyone is presented to himself in a special and primitive way, in which he is presented to no one else. So, when Dr Lauben has the thought that he was wounded, he will probably be basing it on this primitive way in which he is presented to himself. (Frege, (1892/1997), p333 in Beaney (1997))

What does it mean to say that a subject is presented to himself in a special first-personal way when he thinks first-personally? The task of explaining this is taken up by Evans ((1982), Chapter 7). Evans says:

...we have a general capacity to perceive our own bodies, although this can be broken down into several distinguishable capacities: our proprioceptive sense, our sense of balance, of heat and cold, and of pressure. ((1982), p220)

On Evans's view, the subject is presented to himself as a physical object. The ways in which he is presented to himself are special first-personal modes of presentation. It is unlike other modes of presentation of independent objects, or modes of presentation which present a subject to himself non-first-personally. Nevertheless, the subject is present to himself, albeit in a special first-personal way. On Evans view, that the subject is at least sometimes present to himself in these ways is what enables him to think about himself first-personally. When a subject refers non-first-personally to himself, he is present to himself in a

different way, which does not involve the special first-personal mode of presentation.<sup>11</sup>

Evans and Frege agree that two different subjects, Lingens and Dr. Lauben, for instance, both thinking 'I am the cousin of a spy', will have different thoughts. In this they differ from Lewis (1979). They have different thoughts because a different object is presented in each case, in the special first-personal way in which an object can be presented. It is because Lingens is presented to himself in this special first-personal way that he can refer to himself first-personally. And Lingens, thinking both 'I am the cousin of a spy' and 'Lingens is the cousin of a spy' will have two different thoughts because, although the same object is presented, it is presented in different ways in each case. 'I am Lingens' is an informative identity statement which the subject comes to believe when he recognizes that it is the same object being presented in two different ways.

Anscombe (1975) disagrees with Evans's analysis of the evidential situation.

She does not think that the subject is present to himself when he thinks first-personally. This is because she thinks that a subject can still think first-personally even if amnesiac and in a sensory deprivation tank, when no physical object would be presented to him. Her conclusion is that if there is reference here, it could only be reference to a Cartesian Ego, as that is the only thing that could be presented to the subject in such a situation<sup>12</sup>:

For, let us suppose that it is some other object. A plausible one would be *this body*. And now imagine that I get into a state of 'sensory deprivation'. Sight is cut off, and I am locally anaesthetized everywhere, perhaps floated in a tank of tepid water; I am unable to speak, or to touch any part of my body with any other. Now I tell myself 'I won't let this happen again!' If the object meant by 'I' is this body, this human being, then in these circumstances it won't be present to my senses; and how else can it be 'present' to me? But have I lost what I mean by 'I'? Is that not present to me? Am I reduced to, as it were, 'referring in absence'? I

<sup>11</sup> Evans actually explains his understanding of sense in terms of a 'way of thinking of an object', rather than Frege's modes of presentation.

<sup>12</sup> Anscombe actually takes her example of the subject in a sensory deprivation tank to be a case where she has "waive[d] the question about the sense of 'I'" (p146). Her understanding of what is involved to grasp the sense of a term differs from mine – she does not argue that to grasp the sense of an object the subject must be acquainted with it, but instead that to grasp the sense of a term the subject must have a conception of the object referred to, where this involves understanding what kind of object it is.

have not lost my 'self-consciousness'; nor can what I mean by 'I' be an object no longer present to me....

...Nothing but a Cartesian Ego will serve....

Thus we discover that *if* 'I' is a referring expression, then Descartes was right about what the referent was. (Anscombe (1975), p146-7)

Anscombe takes such a conclusion to be absurd, and it is this that leads her to say that 'I' does not refer to an object at all. It cannot be the Ego presented to the subject, as this is absurd, and it cannot be the body presented, as a subject can still think first-personally when amnesiac and sensorily deprived, so no object can be presented at all.

Because Anscombe thinks that no object is presented she thinks that there can be no reference. The Fregean solution must be wrong. 'I am Lingens' said by Lingens, and 'I am E.A.' said by Anscombe, are not identity statements, she thinks:

If I am right in my general thesis, there is an important consequence – namely, that 'I am E.A.' is after all not an identity proposition. It is connected with an identity proposition, namely, 'This thing here is E.A.'. But there is also the proposition 'I am this thing here.' (Anscombe (1975), p148-9)

But this is to make the assumption that if there is reference in first-person thoughts, how a subject refers must be similar to how he refers to other objects. It is precisely this which this thesis aims to challenge. Perhaps the Fregean solution of treating statements like Lingens's 'I am Lingens' as identity statements is basically correct. It is just that the blanket treatment of sense as modes of presentation which is mistaken. Are there any other reasons for thinking that Lingens's statement 'I am Lingens' should not be treated as an informative identity?

Stalnaker (1999, 2003b) thinks that there are. But to understand his reasons, it is first necessary to consider a non-Fregean framework which treats examples where Lingens does not know 'I am Lingens' as a kind of identity confusion. Stalnaker himself does this in his earlier work, and it is this which he later rejects.

### 3 Stalnaker's Proposal

#### 3.1 Stalnaker's Two-Dimensional Framework

Stalnaker's notion of content differs from Frege's. He does not think that content is individuated in a fine-grained way in terms of modes of presentation of objects. The content of an assertion or thought does not consist of Fregean senses or of less fine-grained Russellian propositions: combinations of objects and properties. On Stalnaker's view, possible worlds – different possibilities – are what assertions and other states with content distinguish between:

The content of speech acts and intentional mental states should be identified with their truth-conditions, represented by a set of possible situations. (Stalnaker (1999), p26)

Like Lewis prior to 'Attitudes *De Dicto* and *De Se*' (1979), Stalnaker takes the content of an assertion to be a proposition, where a proposition is a set of possible worlds. Equivalently, a proposition can be seen as a function from possible worlds to truth values – for example, the necessary proposition is true in all possible worlds, and the function takes each possible world to the value True. If a subject says 'Mary is sitting down', then the content of his assertion is a proposition which is the set of all and only the possible worlds in which Mary is sitting down. This is a function from all and only the possible worlds in which Mary is sitting down to the value True. Possible worlds are possible ways the world might be – different combinations of all the actual and possible objects, with all the actual and possible properties. A thinking subject will have a whole range of possible worlds which are compatible with his beliefs. When he comes to have a new belief, the content of this belief can be represented by eliminating possible worlds that are no longer compatible with the belief. A belief is informative if some possibilities are ruled out.

How does a possible worlds notion of content account for a subject coming to learn an informative identity?<sup>13</sup> The belief that Hesperus is a planet and the belief that Phosphorus is a planet are true in exactly the same possible worlds and so seem to have the same content. Not only does it seem implausible that such beliefs have the same content – surely a subject could believe one, but disbelieve the other – but when this is combined with the view that coming to have a belief

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<sup>13</sup> Recall Lewis does not attempt to answer this question in 'Attitudes *de dicto* and *de se*' thinking that the problem of indexical beliefs cuts across this.

consists in ruling worlds out, then it is difficult to see how one can ever come to have a belief in the necessary proposition. ‘Hesperus is Phosphorus’ is true in all possible worlds, so it is difficult to see how a subject can ever come to believe that Hesperus is Phosphorus, as no possible worlds are ruled out. As the terms ‘Hesperus’ and ‘Phosphorus’ refer to the same object in the actual world, and are rigid designators, they must refer to the same object in all possible worlds. So ‘Hesperus is Phosphorus’ is true in all possible worlds. We might represent the proposition, or set of possible worlds like this, where  $j$  is the actual world:

	$j$	$k$
$j$	T	T

Nothing changes when the subject comes to believe that Hesperus is Phosphorus. No worlds are ruled out when the subject comes to have this belief. Thus the belief cannot be informative. The belief that Hesperus is Phosphorus has the same content as the belief that Hesperus is Hesperus – the content of both is the necessary proposition, as both are true in all possible worlds.

Stalnaker argues that in fact the assertions ‘Hesperus is Hesperus’ and ‘Hesperus is Phosphorus’ can have different contents – where the content is still a proposition, interpreted as a set of possible worlds. This is because there is:

...more complexity and flexibility – and more context-dependence – in the relationship between sentences or sentential complements and the propositions they express or denote. Sentences necessarily equivalent in one context may be only contingently equivalent in another. (Stalnaker (1987/1999), p118)

To take account of this context-dependence, Stalnaker introduces the notion of a *propositional concept* which is a function from possible worlds into propositions (e.g. (1978/1999), p81). As propositions are functions from possible worlds to truth-values, one can also think of a propositional concept as being a two-dimensional function from possible worlds to truth-values, or a two-dimensional proposition. Stalnaker is primarily concerned with the content of assertions and the content of belief ascriptions, rather than with the content of a subject’s beliefs or thoughts. However, he also thinks that “[p]ropositional concepts can help us to understand the relationship between the content of a belief and the way that a believer might represent his belief to himself” ((1987/1999), p125) Stalnaker’s suggestion is that when a subject comes to believe (e.g.) that Hesperus is Phosphorus, the content of this belief is the *diagonal proposition* expressed by

'Hesperus is Phosphorus' rather than the horizontal proposition which is standardly denoted by 'Hesperus is Phosphorus'. This is a different set of possible worlds, and so need not be the necessary proposition, so it can be explained how such a belief can be informative.

Consider the subject who does not know whether Hesperus is Phosphorus, and later comes to believe this. Although 'Hesperus' and 'Phosphorus' refer to the same object in all possible worlds, Stalnaker thinks we can imagine a context in which what the subject believes is true. Suppose  $j$  is the actual world, where Hesperus is Phosphorus, and  $k$  is a world where (they) are distinct. The object in the sky in the evening is different to the one in the morning, although the heavens resemble the actual world to the untrained eye (e.g. see Stalnaker (1987/1999), p123). On a standard possible worlds semantics, when a subject believes that Hesperus is Phosphorus he believes the necessary proposition:

	$j$	$k$
$j$	<b>T</b>	T

However, if world  $k$  is considered as actual, then in this world 'Hesperus' and 'Phosphorus' refer to distinct objects. As they refer to distinct objects, they will refer to distinct objects in the counterfactual world  $j$  ( $j$  is counterfactual, as  $k$  is being considered as the actual world). So in world  $k$ , the subject's belief that Hesperus is Phosphorus is false in both  $j$  and  $k$ .

	$j$	$k$
$k$	F	<b>F</b>

Putting these together we have a propositional concept:

	$j$	$k$
$j$	<b>T</b>	T
$k$	F	<b>F</b>

The content of the subject's belief that Hesperus is Phosphorus seems to be the diagonal proposition, highlighted in bold above. When he learns that Hesperus is Phosphorus he rules out world  $k$ , where 'Hesperus' and 'Phosphorus' refer to different objects.

The subject who does not know whether Hesperus is Phosphorus thinks that the possibilities represented by world  $j$  and world  $k$  are both open





Both worlds *j* and *k* are compatible with his belief. When he comes to believe that Hesperus is Phosphorus, world *k* is eliminated. Objects in different worlds are used to model the subject's epistemic possibilities.

Recall that the Fregean explains how the identity statement 'Hesperus is Phosphorus' can be informative by saying that the same object is presented in different ways. Belief content is individuated by mode of presentation of an object, rather than by the object itself. We can understand how the object presented in the Hesperus and Phosphorus case is presented differently to the subject, because it is presented in the evening and the morning, and the subject may not realize it is the same object. For Stalnaker, the fact that the subject sees Hesperus in the evening and Phosphorus in the morning also gives us two different ways in which an object is presented, but these modes of presentation are not part of the content of the belief. Instead, they provide us with a way of determining which alternative possible worlds should be taken into account when characterizing content. Because Venus is presented differently in the morning and evening we should consider possible worlds where in fact there are two different objects – one in the morning, and one in the evening – and possible worlds where there is only one object. We can then use such possible worlds in characterizing a subject's belief. For Stalnaker, a belief is not simply about an object; it is about whatever plays a certain role in the world. This role can be played by different objects in different possible worlds.

Let us return to the amnesiac Lingens case, where Lingens knows that Lingens is the cousin of a spy, but does not know that he himself is the cousin of a spy. In 'Indexical Belief' (1981) Stalnaker thinks this can be resolved by saying that in this case, the proposition believed is not the standard 'horizontal' proposition, but is instead the 'diagonal' proposition. If the horizontal proposition was believed, then both beliefs expressed by 'I am the cousin of a spy' and by 'Lingens is the cousin of a spy' would have the same content, which seems

implausible as the subject can believe one and not the other. However, the diagonal proposition of each sentence is different. In this way, Stalnaker treats Lingens's first-personal and non-first-personal beliefs about himself in the same way as he would treat Lingens's beliefs about Hesperus and Phosphorus. He compares his treatment to that of his treatment of Quine's (1966) example of Ralph, who does not realize that the man in the brown hat is the man on the beach:

My account of the Lingens example treats it as a special case of a more general problem about *de re* belief. The problem is essentially the same, according to my explanation, as the old problem of Orcutt, the man whom Ralph knows in two different guises..... In both the Lingens and the Orcutt cases, the problem is that two distinct individuals in the possible situations used to characterize a state of mind correspond to the same individual in the real world. In the case of Lingens, the relevant real world individual is the same as the one with the state of mind in question, but this does not seem to make very much difference to the explanation. (Stalnaker (1981/1999) p142-3)

As with the Hesperus/Phosphorus case, Stalnaker believes that "to understand the content of a person's belief, ask what the world would be like if the belief were correct." (1981/1999, p136) Because the amnesiac is Lingens, when he refers to himself using 'I', he will rigidly designate Lingens. Thus in all possible worlds, 'I' and 'Lingens' will refer to the same object. But this is not how the world appears to the amnesiac. Instead, different possible situations seem compatible with his beliefs. According to him, there are possible worlds in which an amnesiac lost in a library is reading a biography about a person called 'Lingens'. In some of these worlds the amnesiac is the same as the person called 'Lingens'. In other worlds, there are two people, the amnesiac and the person called 'Lingens' who is read about. Thus in some possible worlds compatible with Lingens's beliefs, there are more objects (i.e. the amnesiac and the person called 'Lingens') than in the actual world – in the possible worlds used to characterize his state of mind there are two distinct individuals which correspond to Lingens in the actual world. Stalnaker gives three possible situations ((1981/1999), p142-3):

*i* is the actual situation in which Lingens the amnesiac is the subject of the biography and is the cousin of a spy

*j* is a possible world in which the biography correctly describes 'Lingens 2', and Lingens the amnesiac is not the cousin of a spy

*k* is like *j*, in that the biography says that Lingens 2 is the cousin of a spy, except that the biography makes false claims, and Lingens 2's cousin is not a spy.

We are trying to get at the content of Lingens's belief that Lingens is the cousin of a spy, and so are looking at the possibilities as Lingens takes them to be. If we take *i* as the actual world, 'Lingens' refers rigidly to Lingens, and Lingens is the cousin of a spy in *i*, but not in *j* or *k*. If *j* is the actual world, 'Lingens' refers rigidly to Lingens 2, who is the cousin of a spy in *j*, but not in *i* or *k*. With *k* as actual 'Lingens' also refers rigidly to Lingens 2, who is the cousin of a spy in *j*, but not in *i* or *k*. So we get the propositional concept:

	<i>i</i>	<i>j</i>	<i>k</i>
<i>i</i>	<b>T</b>	F	F
<i>j</i>	F	<b>T</b>	F
<i>k</i>	F	T	<b>F</b>

The content of Lingens's belief seems to be the diagonal proposition (shown in bold). He is distinguishing between different possibilities, and believes that he is either in *i* or *j*, but not in *k*.

Stalnaker does not discuss the content of Lingens's belief 'I am the cousin of a spy', and how this would differ from the content of 'Lingens is the cousin of a spy'. But he does seem to assume in his descriptions of the possibilities which seem open to the subject that 'I' refers to the amnesiac – he says (p141) that in his description he assumes that in each situation Lingens does not know who the subject of the biography is, but does know who he is – that Lingens himself, rather than Lingens 2, is the person denoted by 'I'. Presumably, in world *i*, 'I' refers to the amnesiac Lingens who is the cousin of a spy. Considering world *i* as actual, 'I' will refer rigidly to Lingens, but in the counterfactual worlds *j* and *k*, the amnesiac Lingens is not a spy. If worlds *j* and *k* are considered as actual, 'I' also refers to the amnesiac Lingens, rather than to Lingens 2 ('Lingens' in these situations refers to Lingens 2). In the counterfactual situations, the amnesiac Lingens is the cousin of a spy in *i*, but not in *j* or *k*. The proposition concept is thus:

	<i>i</i>	<i>j</i>	<i>k</i>
<i>i</i>	<b>T</b>	F	F
<i>j</i>	T	<b>F</b>	F
<i>k</i>	T	F	<b>F</b>

The content of Lingens's belief expressed by 'I am the cousin of a spy' is the diagonal proposition. The only world in which this is true is *i*, where the amnesiac is identical to the subject of the biography. The other worlds, where there is an additional object, Lingens 2, are ruled out. Thus the diagonal proposition is different in this case from that expressed by 'Lingens is the cousin of a spy'.

Stalnaker thinks that he has treated Lingens's beliefs that Lingens would express by 'I am the cousin of a spy' and 'Lingens is the cousin of a spy' in the same way that he would treat Lingens's beliefs that Hesperus is a planet and Phosphorus is a planet. The beliefs have different content because of identity confusion, and this leads to different possible worlds being ruled out.

### 3.2 A Problem for Stalnaker

Stalnaker later rejects his 'Indexical Belief (1981) solution, saying:

This now seems to me at best misleading, and wrong if it implies that there is not a distinctive problem about indexical belief...((1999), p19)

What does ~~he~~ think is wrong with his original position? He had hoped to treat the case of Lingens not knowing 'I am Lingens' in the same way that he treats a subject not realizing that Hesperus is Phosphorus. The subject who does not know whether Hesperus is Phosphorus thinks there are worlds where Hesperus is Phosphorus, and worlds where there are two distinct objects.<sup>14</sup> When he comes to believe that Hesperus is Phosphorus he rules out possible worlds in which there are two entities, rather than one. What happens in the Lingens case when the subject is ignorant over whether he is Lingens? Which worlds are ruled out when he comes to realize that he is Lingens? Stalnaker has characterized the possibilities open by saying that in some worlds there is one object, the amnesiac Lingens 1, who is also being read about. In other worlds there are two objects, the amnesiac Lingens 1, and Lingens 2 who is being read about. So presumably Stalnaker thinks that when the subject learns what he would express by 'I am

<sup>14</sup> These possibilities must be understood on the diagonal

Lingens' he rules out those worlds where there are two entities – Lingens 1 and Lingens 2 – and retains those where there is only one. But, given the possibilities characterized above, this does not seem to give the content of the belief 'I am Lingens'. Instead, it seems to give the content of the belief 'The amnesiac Lingens 1 is Lingens 2 (the person being read about).' And this is not a first-person thought.

The problem can be brought out clearly by considering how Stalnaker, in 'Indexical Belief', tries to explain Lewis's 'two gods' scenario (Lewis (1979), p139). In 'Attitudes *De Dicto* and *De Se*' Lewis describes two gods, one who lives on the tallest mountain and throws down manna, and one who lives on the coldest mountain and throws down thunderbolts. Each is omniscient with respect to propositional knowledge; according to Lewis each knows exactly which world he lives in, and there are no other possible worlds open to him. However, neither knows which god he is. Stalnaker thinks that this is not the case. If we reinterpret along the diagonal, and consider the possibilities as they appear to the gods, Stalnaker thinks that there is not just one possibility, but two possible worlds between which the gods are indifferent. When one of the gods wonders whether he is on the tallest mountain, he is wondering which of two possible worlds is actual; the actual world (W), or one exactly the same except where the gods have swapped places (V). Stalnaker thinks when a god learns which god he is, then he rules out world V.

Lewis has already anticipated this solution, and rejects it outright in his original (1979) article, saying that each god does know exactly which world he was in.

Let's grant, briefly, that the world W of the gods has its qualitative duplicate V in which the gods have traded places. Let the god on the tallest mountain know that his world is W, not V. Let him be omniscient about *all* propositions, not only qualitative ones. How does this help? Never mind V, where he knows he doesn't live. There are still two different mountains in W where he might, for all he knows, be living. (Lewis (1979) p141)

In 'Indexical Belief', Stalnaker thinks Lewis's position gets its plausibility because he compares location in logical space to location in actual space, and says that location in logical space (in a particular possible world) will not tell us where in that possible world we are located. But as Stalnaker is not a realist

about possible worlds he does not think it is so obvious that not knowing where you are in the world is not knowing which world is the actual world. But this is not the root of the problem.

Let us call one god 'X', and the other god 'Y'. X does not know which mountain he is on, or that he is god X. But he does know that god X is either on the tallest or coldest mountain. His belief state can be characterized as leaving open the two possibilities W and V. In world W, X is on the tallest mountain and Y is on the coldest mountain. In world V, the gods have swapped places: Y is on the tallest mountain and X is on the coldest. Suppose god X comes to eliminate the second possible world V, and so now knows that god X is on the tallest mountain and god Y is on the coldest mountain. But he still does not know where he himself is, as he will only know this if he knows that he himself is god X – if he can think 'I am god X'.

Stalnaker's way of accounting for the first-personal thought of Lingens and of Lewis's two gods certainly seems to be incorrect. But is this because it is a mistake to treat a subject who does not know 'I am X' as not knowing an informative identity statement? This is the conclusion that Stalnaker draws. But I do not think that this is the problem. I think instead it is that Stalnaker has characterized the possibilities which are open incorrectly.

Let us return to the case of the amnesiac Lingens, reading a biography of himself in the library. The possibilities which Stalnaker described as being open to the subject involved some worlds where the amnesiac Lingens and Lingens being read about were one and the same, and other worlds where there were two objects, Lingens the amnesiac, and Lingens 2 who was being read about. In these worlds both Lingens the amnesiac and Lingens 2 are counterparts of the actual Lingens. If the worlds where there were two counterparts of Lingens were ruled out, the subject's belief seems only to be the identity belief that 'The amnesiac Lingens is the subject of the biography Lingens 2', rather than the realization that he would express by 'I am Lingens'. This obviously does not capture the first-personal content of his belief. But consider again a Fregean way of looking at this example. The presumption made in Section 2 of this chapter was that we could explain why the content of the subject's belief that 'I am the

cousin of a spy' differed from that of 'Lingens is the cousin of a spy' because in the first case the object is presented to the subject in a special first-personal way, while in the second case the object is presented through testimony. Modes of presentation were used to individuate content. Can we now use these modes of presentation to characterize the possible worlds open to Lingens the subject?

Consider the following:

World 1: 'I' and 'Lingens' both refer to one and the same object, which is the cousin of a spy

World 2: 'I' and 'Lingens' both refer to one and the same object which is not the cousin of a spy

World 3: 'I' and 'Lingens' refer to two distinct objects. The object 'I' refers to is not the cousin of a spy. The object 'Lingens' refers to is the cousin of a spy.

World 4: 'I' and 'Lingens' refer to two distinct objects. The object 'I' refers to is the cousin of a spy. The object 'Lingens' refers to is not the cousin of a spy.

World 5: 'I' and 'Lingens' refer to distinct objects, neither of which is the cousin of a spy

World 6: 'I' and 'Lingens' refer to distinct objects, both of which are the cousin of a spy.

If the subject does not know that he is Lingens, then the content of his belief that Lingens is the cousin of a spy will be worlds 1, 3 and 6. Worlds 2, 4 and 5 will be ruled out. If his belief is 'I am the cousin of a spy' his belief has the content represented by worlds 1, 4 and 6. Worlds 2, 3 and 5 are ruled out. When he comes to believe what he would express by saying 'I am Lingens and am the cousin of a spy' he eliminates all worlds except world 1.

There seems nothing wrong in principle with characterizing the possibilities open in this way – in terms of the referents of 'I' and 'Lingens'. But once this has been done explicitly, it can be seen why Stalnaker has a problem with it. A crucial notion for Stalnaker is that of shared informational content – what is communicated between a speaker and his audience. A belief or assertion is informative if some possibilities are ruled out. As Stalnaker writes in his *Introduction to Context and Content* (1999):

The reason I thought, and continue to think, that it is important to represent the contents of indexical beliefs as impersonal propositions is that we want our notion of content to help explain persistence and change of belief, agreement and disagreement between different believers, and

the communication of beliefs. When, for example, I tell the amnesiac who he is, he learns something that I already knew, so there had better be a proposition that represents what I knew and he learned.(p20)

The worlds 1 to 6 described above do not seem to fulfil this role. When Lingens comes to believe 'I am Lingens' he locates himself in world 1 or 2, ruling out those worlds where 'I' and 'Lingens' refer to distinct objects. But can this be what Lingens himself learns, or must this be private to Lingens? It has echoes of Frege's comment about the sense of 'I':

Now everyone is presented to himself in a special and primitive way, in which he is presented to no one else... And only Dr Lauben himself can grasp thoughts specified in this way. (Frege (1918/1997), p333)

There is another problem for Stalnaker. He wants to limit the possible worlds which represent the content of an assertion (or other states with content) to metaphysically possible worlds. In the Hesperus/Phosphorus identity confusion case he thinks it is possible to do this. In some worlds characterizing the subject's belief state there are two entities, both counterparts of Venus. But these are objects in the possible worlds which play the two different roles that Venus plays in the actual world (as Hesperus and as Phosphorus). In the Lingens case, as Stalnaker says:

...Lingens's belief is not simply about Lingens; it is about whoever plays a certain role in the world, and that role is played by different people in different alternative possible situations. (Stalnaker (1981/1999), p140)

Stalnaker is quite happy that two different objects can play the role of Lingens (being read about) and Lingens the amnesiac. But he does not want to objectify the referent of 'I' in the way that would need to be done (as in Worlds 1-6 above) to capture the first-personal nature of the belief. What would it be for there to be a separate *I* in the world? He thinks this is objectifying the self, which he does not want to do.

Stalnaker limits epistemic possibility to metaphysical possibility. For Stalnaker, if the referent of 'I' and the referent of 'Lingens' are distinct in some of the possible worlds which make up the diagonal proposition used to characterize the subject's state of mind, this means that such possibilities must be metaphysically possible. This is a problem for him, as he thinks that if there are worlds where



the referent of 'I' and the referent of 'Lingens' are distinct, then he thinks this must involve objectifying the self, which he thinks is a mistake:

....I am not sure that the metaphysics can be so easily avoided. If the thought 'I am TN' (thought by TN) is conceivably false (if even a logically omniscient TN might grasp the thought without knowing that it is true), then why is its falsity not a metaphysical possibility? (Stalnaker (2003a), p261 n10)

This is not a problem for the Fregean. The Fregean does not have to accept that it is metaphysically possible that the referent of 'I' and the referent of 'Lingens' are distinct. Instead – one object, Lingens – is presented in two different ways. It is presented in a special first-personal way, and through reading about himself. Stalnaker's limitation of epistemic possibility to metaphysical possibility, and his austere notion of content in terms of possible worlds, means that he cannot treat a subject Lingens's failure to know 'I am Lingens' as merely the result of identity confusion. But there is no reason why the Fregean, making different assumptions about content, cannot continue to do so.

#### **4 Anticipation**

The Fregean can explain how Lingens's thought 'I am the cousin of a spy' can be different in content to his thought 'Lingens is the cousin of a spy'. The sense of 'I', said by Lingens, and the sense of 'Lingens' are different in each case. The statement 'I am Lingens' is an informative identity statement because of this. But the problem comes when senses are understood as modes of presentation. Anscombe thinks that a subject can still think first-personally even when there is no possibility he could be present to himself. Thinking first-personally – thinking thoughts expressed by 'I' – cannot, she thinks, involve a subject being presented to himself. And so she thinks 'I' cannot refer, and 'I am Lingens' said by Lingens cannot be an identity statement.

It is time to explore what it is for a subject to have a singular thought about an object; what it is for him to refer to an object. I will argue that an object being present to the subject is indeed necessary for reference to independent objects; the subject must be acquainted with the object, where acquaintance between subject and object is the converse of presentation of object to subject. This is what puts the subject in a position to think about a particular object; it enables

him to think about one object rather than another. But acquaintance is not required in first-personal thought; the subject is already in a position to think about himself. A statement such as 'I am Lingens', said by Lingens, is an identity statement. Both sides of it involve the subject thinking about himself in different ways. But this is not because he is present to himself in two different ways. When he thinks first-personally he is not present to himself in a way which grounds reference.

## **Part II**

### **Acquaintance**

## Chapter 3

### The Role of Acquaintance: Explaining Thought?

A subject often has thoughts about particular objects in the world. I may think about this particular cup next to me, or this particular keyboard I am typing on. I may think of Bertrand Russell, and his views on acquaintance. I may think of my mother, remembering her. It is an assumption made throughout this thesis that a subject's thoughts about particular objects are fundamentally different to his general or descriptive thoughts. A subject may be thinking about a particular object even if he is totally mistaken about its properties – he is thinking about that particular object, rather than about something having certain properties. To have a general or descriptive thought, the subject thinks of whatever it is that satisfies the description. Even if there is only one object which satisfies the description, having such a general thought is not the same as having a singular thought about a particular object.

What is it for a subject to have a thought about a particular object? Some philosophers take as their starting point the view that thought involves representations. For a thought to be about a particular object it must contain a representation of that object. Thus we find Crimmins (1992) saying that a subject's thought is about an object if it contains a notion of an object, where a notion of an object is a representation of an object:

My belief that Ockham was a metaphysician is a belief about an individual and, in a sense, about a property....The belief involves two representations: my representation of Ockham, and my representation of the property of being a metaphysician. Beliefs that involve representations of things, properties and relations – beliefs that are “conceptually articulated” – I call *ideational beliefs*. Among the representations that figure in ideational beliefs, I will call the representations of things *notions*.... (Crimmins (1992), p75)

Millikan (1997) also takes it for granted that to think about an object the subject's mind has a representation of the object, and she goes on to investigate the way that the subject's mind might be able to represent “...that two of its representations were of the same object ...” (Millikan (1997), p500). Sainsbury (2007) follows, terming the representations of objects *individual concepts*:

I shall suggest that mental reference is structurally similar to linguistic reference. Corresponding to referring expressions are what I call

individual concepts. These are not Fregean senses or functions from possible worlds to entities, but elements of individual psychology. (Sainsbury (2007), p216)

The view that thought involves representations is not uncontroversial. But even if one accepts this premise, saying that a thought contains a notion or an individual concept is not yet to say what is involved in a subject's thinking of an object. We still need to know what it is for a subject's thought to contain a notion or an individual concept of an object. And so we return to the question: what is it for a subject to have a thought about a particular object? I will argue that to think about a particular object which is independent of him, the subject must be acquainted with the object.

I want to make it clear from the outset that I am not making huge claims here. I am not claiming that a subject's acquaintance with an object fully explains how he is able to think about an object. Rather, I am claiming that without being acquainted with an object, the subject is not in a position to think about it in the first place. Thus my claims are not as strong as Russell's, the person with whom the principle of acquaintance is most associated. At one point Russell gives the notion of acquaintance an explanatory role, and thinks that it is a subject's acquaintance with the constituents of a proposition which enables a subject to think about things in the world.<sup>1</sup> Campbell, in *Reference and Consciousness* (2002), takes a similar line, when he tries to explain how a subject is able to have demonstrative thoughts. Campbell thinks that conscious attention to an object is necessary for a subject to think about an object, and thinks that Russell's notion of acquaintance is a model for conscious attention. Campbell says:

Russell thought of acquaintance as a cognitive relation more primitive than thought about an object, which nonetheless, by reaching all the way to the object, made thought about the object possible. I will argue that this provides a model for the way in which we think of conscious attention to an object. It is a state more primitive than thought about the object, which, nonetheless, by bringing the object itself into the subjective life of the thinker, makes it possible to think about that object. (Campbell (2002), p6)

But Campbell goes further than this, not only saying that conscious attention makes thought about an object possible, but also that it explains it:

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<sup>1</sup> Russell's notion of acquaintance is not limited to a subject's acquaintance with particulars. This will be discussed below.

...conscious attention to an object must be thought of as more primitive than thought about the object. It is a state more primitive than thought about an object, to which we can appeal in *explaining* how it is that we can think about the thing. ((2002), p45 my emphasis)

I think that it is because Russell came to think that acquaintance could not be playing this explanatory role that he eventually rejects the notion in (1919). Unlike Russell and Campbell I will not attempt to explain exactly how it is that a subject has a singular thought about an object. Instead, my claim is a much more modest one. I argue only that a subject's acquaintance with an independent object is a necessary condition for his being able to think about the object. Without being acquainted with the object, the subject would not be in a position to think about the object in the first place. Whilst I shall not argue against Campbell (2002) here, someone accepting my position need not be committed to his.

Nevertheless, despite his own rejection of it, I think Russell was basically right about the acquaintance relation. Although he is notorious for later severely limiting what a subject can be acquainted with, I do not think that this is essential to the notion. Instead I think Russell gets it right when he says:

I think that the relation of subject and object which I call acquaintance is simply the converse of the relation of object and subject which constitutes presentation (Russell (1911), p200-01)

I do not want to claim much more for the relation than this. This means that I reject interpretations of Russell which require that a subject has discriminating knowledge of an object in order to be able to think of it; that he know which object it is.<sup>2</sup> I do not think this is necessary for a subject to have a thought about an object. I also think there are cases where a subject may have discriminating knowledge of an object, but not be able to have a singular thought about it. The other thing which I think Russell's understanding of acquaintance brings out is that the object with which the subject is acquainted with – the object present to the subject – is essential to the thought. If the subject were acquainted with a different object, a different object would be present and he would have a different thought. Thus I disagree with those such as Burge (1977), Blackburn (1984) and Bach (1987), who think that a single mode of presentation of an

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<sup>2</sup> Evans calls the principle that to think about an object the subject must know which object he is thinking about 'Russell's Principle', which I think is a misnomer.

object can present a different object depending on the context. Instead, with *Hammer* Evans (1982), I think the object is essential to the mode of presentation. So suppose a subject looks at a red apple, and thinks the thought he would express by 'This apple is red.' Suppose also that at some point the apple is replaced with an identical-looking apple without the subject realizing this. The subject looks and again thinks 'This apple is red'. It is a consequence of my understanding of the notion of acquaintance that as a different object is presented in each case, the subject has two different thoughts. And the fact that the subject does not have discriminating knowledge of either apple does not stop him being acquainted with each of them – each is present to him – and so he can think about each apple.

This chapter focuses primarily on the work of Russell. Russell's position from 1903 until 1919 is that a subject's acquaintance with the world is what makes his judgements and thoughts about the world. A subject's acquaintance with objects and relations puts him in a position to think of them, and it is these very things which are combined in thought. This explanatory role of acquaintance is explored, including the more modern variant of Campbell (2002). I do not want to claim as much for acquaintance as Russell did; I am not trying to explain exactly how thought and knowledge is possible. But I do want to develop Russell's basic notion of acquaintance – that a subject's acquaintance with objects puts him in a position to think about them – even if I do not accept his reasons for this. Russell's understanding of acquaintance as explaining and grounding thought is explored in this chapter, and then a less ambitious role for it as restricting singular thought is developed in Chapter 4.

## **1 Russell's Early Work: Propositions**

### **1.1 Principles of Mathematics (1903)**

In *Principles of Mathematics* (1903) neither a subject's thought about the world nor acquaintance are major issues for Russell. Instead, one of Russell's primary concerns is propositions. Russell's aim in this book is to discuss logic and the theory of classes, and to argue for logicism – that pure mathematics and logic are identical.<sup>3</sup> The reason that propositions are so important is that Russell sees

<sup>3</sup> E.g. see the 'Introduction to the Second Edition', and the 'Preface' for a declaration of the fundamental thesis of the book.

logic as concerned with propositions and not with sentences.<sup>4</sup> Russell acknowledges Moore's influence on his notion of a proposition (e.g. (1903), p.xviii). In 'The Nature of Judgment' (1899) Moore argues that:

A proposition is composed not of words, nor yet of thoughts, but of concepts. Concepts are possible objects of thought; but that is no definition of them. It merely states that they may come into relation with a thinker; and in order that they *may* do anything, they must already *be* something. It is indifferent to their nature whether anybody thinks them or not. (Moore (1899), p179)

Russell agrees that propositions are not composed of words, saying:

...a proposition, unless it happens to be linguistic, does not itself contain words: it contains the entities indicated by words. (Russell (1903), p47)

In (1903), Russell calls the constituents of propositions 'terms', and a term may be a particular, a class, a relation, even a non-existent object:

Whatever may be an object of thought, or may occur in any true or false proposition, or can be counted as *one*, I call a *term*....A man, a moment, a number, a class, a relation, a chimaera, or anything else that can be mentioned, is sure to be a term (Russell (1903), p43)

It seems that Russell thinks of the constituents of propositions as things in the world.<sup>5</sup> This is made clearer in a letter from Russell to Frege in 1904, where he says:

I believe that in spite of all its snowfields Mont Blanc is itself a component part of what is actually asserted in the sentence 'Mont Blanc is more than 4,000 metres high'. We do not assert the thought, for this is a private psychological matter: we assert the object of the thought, and this is, to my mind, a certain complex [a proposition]...in which Mont Blanc is itself a component part.<sup>6</sup>

Propositions themselves are true or false. It is not a sentence, or a subject's thought, that is true or false. And propositions do not correspond to some underlying reality – they are the reality. There is no separate layer of 'facts' to which true propositions must correspond; a fact, if there is such a thing, is simply

<sup>4</sup> Although at this stage Russell does think that sentences and the words that make them up approximately reflect propositions and their constituents, e.g. see p41 (1903)

<sup>5</sup> Moore says:

It seems necessary, then, to regard the world as formed of concepts. These are the only objects of knowledge. They cannot be regarded fundamentally as abstractions either from things or from ideas; since both alike can, if anything is to be true of them, be composed of nothing but concepts. (Moore (1899, p182))

This may seem different from the view I have attributed to Russell that terms are things in the world, but really there is little difference as there is no distinction between ideas and things in the world – the subject's thought goes directly to the terms in the world. See below for discussion.

<sup>6</sup> From *Nachgelassene Schriften und wissenschaftliche Briefwechsel*, vol 2, p250-1, translated in *Philosophical and Mathematical Correspondence*, p169, quoted in Hylton (2003), p210



a true proposition. The constituents of a proposition do not represent what the proposition is about – they are what the proposition is about.

Russell's underlying theory of knowledge at this stage is that in judging something to be true, a subject apprehends a true proposition, while in judging something to be false he apprehends a false proposition. So, for example, for a subject to think that Mary is sitting down he apprehends the proposition with the constituents of the particular Mary, and the property of sitting down.<sup>7</sup> If this proposition is true then the subject has a true belief; if it is false, he has a false belief. As the constituents of the proposition are terms – i.e. objects and relations in the world – by apprehending a proposition the subject comes into direct contact with things in the world. This is supposed to explain how a subject can know things and can think about the world. As Russell continues in his letter to Frege, the first part of which is quoted above:

If we do not admit [that Mont Blanc is a component part of what is asserted in the sentence], then we get the conclusion that we know nothing at all about Mont Blanc.

As Mont Blanc itself is a constituent of the proposition, the subject can know about and think about Mont Blanc. There is thus no problem with how a subject's representations of particulars and universals – his *notions* and *ideas* to use Crimmins's terminology – can be about particulars and universals. There are no representations; the subject apprehends a proposition which contains these particulars and universals. Knowledge and judgement is unproblematic – the subject's apprehension of the proposition is all that is needed to explain it.

A subject's apprehension of a proposition may be thought of as his acquaintance with a proposition. So at this stage, acquaintance is doing some work in Russell's theory, explaining how a subject can think things. But at this point, a subject's acquaintance with the *constituents* of a proposition is not doing much work for Russell. However, he does seem to assume that to apprehend a proposition the subject must be acquainted with each of its constituents: particulars (existent or otherwise), relations, or classes. This can be seen by Russell's discussion of Cantor's theory of the infinite. Once he accepts Cantor's

<sup>7</sup> Much of Russell's discussion over this period concerns the *unity of the proposition*. What is it that combines the particulars and relations? I do not discuss such issues much here; Russell's views on this change throughout the period which I am discussing.

theory Russell holds that there are some infinite classes about which a subject can apprehend propositions, and yet Russell thinks that the subject cannot be acquainted with the classes themselves, because they are infinite. For example, a subject can understand the proposition expressed by 'Any number has a successor' which is about an infinite class. But Russell does not allow the infinite class to be a constituent of the proposition, and this seems to be because the subject cannot be acquainted with it. Hence Russell's underlying position seems to be that in order to be a constituent of a proposition apprehended by a subject, the subject must be acquainted with that constituent, as well as with the proposition as a whole.

Because Russell thinks that we cannot be acquainted with infinite classes he feels that he needs to introduce *denoting concepts* which enable a subject to think about an object with which he cannot be acquainted. In the above example the denoting concept is *any number* and this denotes an infinite class which is not a constituent of the proposition. The denoting concept is a constituent of the proposition instead of the infinite class, and it is important to note that this denoting concept is, like other constituents, non-linguistic.<sup>8</sup> It is an entity which somehow denotes another object, and enables the subject to think about this other object without being acquainted with it.<sup>9</sup> Russell's view at this point seems to be that a subject can be acquainted with most objects, and can therefore think directly about those objects (such objects are constituents of the proposition apprehended). But in order to think about those few objects with which he cannot be acquainted, the subject must think of them via denoting concepts. There is disagreement over whether Russell's discussion of infinity is an exception to his early view that one can be acquainted with all objects, or whether it marks a change from his early view. Hylton takes the former view, arguing:

Russell does not state the principle of acquaintance in *Principles*, but it is, I think, implicit in that work. It receives no formulation because Russell simply has no interest in issues of this sort. Nor is there any reason for him to formulate it, since at this stage in his work it imposes no

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<sup>8</sup> In later work, such as (1905) Russell uses the term 'denoting phrase' which is linguistic. In *Principles* the constituent in the proposition corresponding to a denoting phrase would be a denoting concept. Russell rejects this view in (1905) – see later discussion in this chapter.

<sup>9</sup> For an interesting discussion of whether a subject is acquainted with a denoting concept see Levine (1998)

constraints and is thus quite trivial. The one exception to this is the case of propositions about the infinite, for Russell denies that we are acquainted with any such propositions. (Hylton (1990), p246)

Levine (1998), in 'Acquaintance, Denoting Concepts, and Sense' takes the latter view, seeing *Principles* as the point when acquaintance is no longer unrestricted – there are some objects in the world with which the subject cannot be acquainted. This dispute does not matter much here, as the main point to get across is that in his early work acquaintance with the constituents of propositions does not do much work for Russell. The important thing for Russell is that to think about something the subject apprehends a proposition. For the few cases where the subject cannot be acquainted with an object – examples include propositions containing *a man*, *any man*, *some man* etc. – Russell thinks that non-linguistic denoting concepts are part of the proposition.

Denoting concepts are problematic for Russell, however. His notion of a subject's apprehending a proposition no longer seems to explain how it is that he can think about the world. By apprehending a proposition a subject is supposed to be in direct contact with its constituents, and hence can think about them. But denoting concepts are representational – the object thought about is represented, but is not itself part of the proposition. Russell at no point seems to give any explanation of how such denoting concepts denote what they do, and so how a subject can come to think about what the concept denotes. In the example given above, there is no clear explanation of how a subject can think about an infinite class – his thought only seems to be about the denoting concept which denotes the class. As Hylton (2003) puts it:

...only if the object we are talking about...is actually a component part of the proposition which we grasp can our thought actually get through to that object; only so can we have knowledge which is really about it. (Hylton (2003), p219)

A subject's apprehension of a proposition no longer seems to explain how he can think about things.

## 1.2 The Theory of Descriptions

'On Denoting' (1905) marks a key change in Russell's thought. Because of his Theory of Descriptions, introduced in this article, Russell thinks he can get rid of

the problematic denoting concepts. In this article Russell also acknowledges his interest in the theory of knowledge, saying that:

The subject of denoting is of very great importance, not only in logic and mathematics, but also in the theory of knowledge (Russell (1905), p479)

Russell also introduces a distinction between things with which we have immediate acquaintance, and things that we can only know by description. As far as I am aware, this is where he first gives an indication of what he takes acquaintance to be:

The distinction between *acquaintance* and *knowledge about* is the distinction between the things we have presentations of, and the things we only reach by means of denoting phrases. (Russell (1905), p479)

Acquaintance is a relation between subject and thing where the thing is presented to the subject.<sup>10</sup>

As a result of his Theory of Descriptions, introduced in (1905), Russell now feels that he can explain how a subject can have knowledge of objects or classes with which he is not acquainted *without* having to postulate denoting concepts. Russell now argues that a subject can have *knowledge by description*, where his knowledge concerns an object denoted by a denoting phrase – such as ‘a man’, ‘any man’, ‘the man’, ‘some man’, ‘every man’, ‘no man’ etc. The subject is not acquainted with the object, but instead is acquainted with the meanings of the words in the denoting phrase when it is reinterpreted. For example, if a subject knows that everything is blue, then what he knows is ‘*x is blue is always true*’. If he knows that all men have bones then he knows that ‘*if x is human then x has bones is always true*’. Most famously, in the case of definite descriptions, if he knows that the King of France is bald then what he knows is that *It is not always false of x that x is the King of France and that x is bald and that ‘if y is the King of France, y is identical with x’ is always true of y*. (e.g. (1905), p482) Or, put more simply, perhaps, what the subject knows is: at least one thing is the King of France, at most one thing is the King of France, and whatever is the King of France is bald. Schematically, if he knows that the *F* is *G*, then what he knows is that at least one thing is *F*, at most one thing is *F*, and whatever is *F* is *G*. He does not need to be acquainted with the object that is the *F* (although he does need to be acquainted the universals *F* and *G*). Russell no longer has to postulate

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<sup>10</sup> Here, ‘thing’ does not mean particular, but anything that can be a constituent of a proposition.

denoting concepts, because he now thinks that the subject is acquainted with each element of the proposition as reinterpreted.

Thus it seems that Russell hopes to restore the explanatory role of acquaintance. The explanation is again that a subject can think about things in the world because he apprehends a proposition, and he is acquainted with all the constituents of the proposition. This means that his thought is unproblematically about objects and relations in the world, as he is acquainted with the constituents of the proposition, which are objects and relations, not representations of anything. The subject can also think about things with which he is not acquainted – but his thought does not go directly to these things. Instead, he thinks about them by description, which is a different kind of thought from one where a particular is part of the proposition. As Russell says:

All thinking has to start from acquaintance; but it succeeds in thinking *about* many things with which we have no acquaintance. (Russell (1905), p480)

But it is not clear that the Theory of Descriptions really achieves all Russell hopes for it. Firstly, it does not solve the problem which denoting concepts were supposed to solve. Denoting concepts were a problem for Russell, as he could give no account of how a subject's thought could concern the object denoted, rather than the concept itself, but they were introduced for a reason. This reason was to try to explain generality, such as in the statement 'Every number has a successor'. The denoting concept *every number* was supposed somehow to denote an infinite class, with which the subject could not be acquainted. So one might think that in (1905) Russell hopes to eliminate the problematic denoting concepts, and also to explain generality, as the latter task was so essential to him in (1903). But in (1905) Russell does not explain generality at all. He says:

I take the notion of the *variable* as fundamental; I use 'C(x)' to mean a proposition [footnote: More exactly, a propositional function.] in which *x* is a constituent, where *x*, the variable, is essentially and wholly undetermined. Then we can consider the two notions 'C(x) is always true' and 'C(x) is sometimes true'. [footnote: The second of these can be defined by means of the first, if we take it to mean, 'It is not true that "C(x) is false" is always true.'] ((1905), p480)

As Russell comments in 'On Fundamentals' (June 1905, unpublished) he now takes the variable to be fundamental and unexplained.<sup>11</sup> He also helps himself to the notion of a propositional function ( $C(x)$ ) and the notion of a propositional function being *always true* (' $C(x)$  is always true' can also be written  $\forall x Cx$ ). But by taking such things as fundamental it seems that Russell has given up any attempt to explain generality.

More importantly for the purposes of this chapter, as far as a theory of knowledge is concerned, Russell's Theory of Descriptions does not really restore Russell's simple view of knowledge as a relation between subject and proposition, where the subject is acquainted with each element in the proposition. Recall that the subject is supposed to be able to think that Mary is sitting down, for example, by apprehending the proposition with the constituents of the particular *Mary*, and the property of *sitting down*. In (1905), for the first time, Russell states his Principle of Acquaintance:

Thus is every proposition that we can apprehend (*i.e.* not only in those whose truth or falsehood we can judge of, but in all that we can think about), all the constituents are really entities with which we have immediate acquaintance. (Russell (1905), p492)

When the subject apprehends the proposition that Mary is sitting down, he is acquainted with *Mary* and with the property of *sitting down*. What about when a subject apprehends a proposition expressed by a sentence containing a denoting phrase? In this case, Russell still holds that the subject must be acquainted with all constituents of the proposition. But these constituents are not what is denoted (which the subject may not be acquainted with) but are instead the "constituents expressed by the several words of the denoting phrase" ((1905), p492). This means, for example, that a subject who thinks that everything is blue, apprehends the proposition expressed by '*x is blue*' *is always true*, or  $\forall x x \text{ is blue}$ . But what does it mean to be acquainted with each element in this proposition? It would seem that the subject must be acquainted with the variable  $x$ , with the propositional function  $x \text{ is blue}$ , and with *is always true* ( $\forall x$ ). This is just what Moore questions in a letter to Russell in 1905:

What I should chiefly like explained is this. You say '*all* the constituents of propositions we apprehend are entities with which we have immediate

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<sup>11</sup> e.g. see p256, Hylton (1990)

acquaintance.' Have we, then, immediate acquaintance with the variable? And what sort of entity is it? (quoted in Hylton (1990), p256)

But Russell is not sure whether or not we are acquainted with the variable. As he responds to Moore:

The view I usually incline to is that we have immediate acquaintance with the variable, but it is not an entity. Then at other times I think it is an entity, but an indeterminate one. In the former view there is still a problem of meaning and denotation as regards the variable itself. I only profess to reduce the problem of denoting to the problem of the variable. This latter is horribly difficult, and there seem equally strong objections to all the views I have been able to think of. (quoted in Hylton (1990) p256)

As Russell comments, if a subject is acquainted with the variable, and yet his thought is (indirectly) about whatever the variable denotes, then we have the same problems we had before with denoting concepts. Although the subject is acquainted with the variable, his thought is about whatever the variable denotes. And there is no explanation of how the variable denotes. Alternatively, if it is an entity, what kind of entity is it?

Russell seems to hope that he will find a solution to the problem of the variable, because at this stage he shows no signs of giving up his theory of acquaintance. Russell still thinks that all thinking starts from acquaintance – and that acquaintance has an explanatory role. Indeed, rather than giving up on the notion of acquaintance, it becomes even more important to Russell. After 1905 Russell begins to focus on how a subject can judge and think things. He thinks a subject's acquaintance with things and relations is crucial to explain this, particularly when he gives up his original theory of knowledge, and rejects propositions.

## **2 Russell's Rejection of Propositions**

Recall that around 1905 Russell thinks that thought or judgement is a dual relation between a subject and proposition. If a subject has a true thought he is acquainted with a true proposition; if he has a false thought he is acquainted with a false proposition. There is no separate layer of facts to which true propositions correspond; propositions themselves are true or false. In *Problems of Philosophy* (1912), Russell rejects this, writing:

The necessity of allowing for falsehood makes it impossible to regard belief as a relation of the mind to a single object, which could be said to be what is believed. If belief were so regarded, we should find that...it would not admit of the opposition of truth and falsehood, but would have to always be true. This may be made clear by examples. Othello believes falsely that Desdemona loves Cassio. We cannot say that this belief consists in a relation to a single object, 'Desdemona's love for Cassio', for if there were such an object, the belief would be true. There is in fact no such object, and therefore Othello cannot have any relation to such an object. Hence his belief cannot possibly consist in a relation to this object. (Russell (1912), p72)

In his *Theory of Knowledge* (1913), Russell says of his original view that it results "from a certain logical naivete, which compels us, from poverty of available hypotheses, to do violence to instincts which deserve respect" ((1913), p10). Russell no longer sees how there can be false propositions. He says:

We might be induced to admit that *true* propositions are entities, but it is very difficult, except under the lash of a tyrannous theory, to admit that *false* propositions are entities. .... ((1913), p109)

Instead of accounting for a subject's knowledge by saying that the subject apprehends a proposition, Russell introduces his multiple relation theory of judgement.<sup>12</sup> Instead of a subject apprehending a proposition, he must now be acquainted with each constituent of what was formerly thought to be a proposition. So, for example, for a subject to think that Mary is sitting down, Russell no longer thinks that the subject apprehends the proposition consisting of Mary and the property of sitting down. Instead, he is acquainted with Mary, and acquainted with the property of sitting down. If a subject judges that Mary loves John he must be acquainted with *Mary*, the relation of *loving*, and *John*. There is a link with Russell's previous view as a subject is still acquainted with objects and relations in the world. It is because of this that he can think of objects and relations – his thought goes directly to them.

Russell now thinks that if a subject makes a true judgement his thought corresponds to the facts; if his judgement is false, it does not. Truth and falsity are no longer properties of propositions; instead thoughts or judgements are true or false, and true thoughts correspond with the facts. Thus if a subject thinks

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<sup>12</sup> Russell's Multiple Relation Theory of Judgement is slightly different in each of (1911), (1912) and (1913). I ignore these differences here, as they are incidental to my main point, and I focus on his theory in (1913).



truly that Mary is sitting down, there is a corresponding fact of Mary having the property of sitting down. When a subject makes a false judgement there is no false proposition for him to apprehend. So if a subject thinks that Tony Blair is a woman, there is no false proposition containing *Tony Blair* and the property of womanhood. The subject is instead acquainted with the object *Tony Blair* and the property of womanhood, and combines these in a certain way, in thought. It is being acquainted with things in the world that enables the subject to think about the world – these things can then be combined in thought to make false judgements. But as this combination of objects and universals does not exist in reality – there is no fact of Tony Blair being a woman – the way in which the objects and universals are combined in thought must be different from how they are combined in the world. This is an issue for Russell as the content of the subject's thought is the objects and relations themselves, not representations of objects and relations. The way the subject unites these objects and relations in thought must not be the same as the way they are (or are not) united in the world. There needs to be a difference so there can be a correspondence between the judgement and the facts if the judgement is true. Russell 'solves' this problem by saying that in the case of judging that (e.g.) Mary loves John, the subject must be acquainted not only the with objects *Mary* and *John* and the relation *loving*, but that he must also "...know how these three terms are meant to be combined; and this....required acquaintance with the general form of a dual complex." ((1913), p111) The general form of a dual complex is "something has some relation to something". The general form of a subject-predicate complex is "something has some predicate". So if a subject believes that Tony Blair is a woman then he is acquainted with the object Blair, the property of womanhood, and also acquainted with the form "something has some predicate". Russell thinks that the subject must be acquainted with these general forms, or what he calls the logical form:

I think it may be shown that acquaintance with logical form is involved before explicit thought about logic begins, in fact as soon as we can understand a sentence. Let us suppose that we are acquainted with Socrates and with Plato and with the relation 'precedes', but not with the complex "Socrates precedes Plato". Supposed now that some one tells us that Socrates precedes Plato. How do we know what he means? It is plain that his statement does not give us *acquaintance* with the complex "Socrates precedes Plato". What we understand is that Socrates and Plato and "precedes" are united in a complex of the form " $xRy$ ", where

Socrates has the *x*-place and Plato has the *y*-place. It is difficult to see how we could possibly understand how Socrates and Plato and “precedes” are to be combined unless we had acquaintance with the form of the complex. ((1913), p99)

He says (p116) that he had originally thought that the subject just needed to be acquainted with objects and universals, but now does not. It is by being acquainted with the logical form that our thought can combine the objects and relations, but the objects and relations are not necessarily united in reality. By being acquainted with the form, the subject understands what it is for the objects and universals to be related. Russell concludes:

I do not know how to make this point more evident, and I must therefore leave it to the reader's inspection, in hopes that he will arrive at the same conclusion. ((1913), p116)

How a subject is acquainted with a logical form is complicated – logical forms cannot themselves have constituents, but must be simple, for instance – but the details do not concern us here. The important thing is that a subject's acquaintance with objects, relations and logical forms are what enable him to think and judge things.

Acquaintance is thus vital to Russell (1913). It is through acquaintance that a subject has contact with the external world:

All three kinds of acquaintance [with objects, universals and logical forms] fulfil the same function of providing the data for judgement and inference ((1913), p100)

By being acquainted with such things, the subject can combine them in thought to make true or false judgements. Russell (1913) now elaborates on the notion of acquaintance, explaining that there are various ways in which, for instance, a particular can be presented to a subject. For instance (p79) there is *attention*, which selects one object. There is also *sensation*, *memory* (“which applies only to past objects”) and *imagination* (“which gives objects without any temporal relation to the subject”). These are all relations between subject and object which are “recognizably different ways of experiencing particular objects”. These relations “provide the data” or enable a subject to think about particular objects. There are similar relations of acquaintance between subject and relations, and subject and logical forms.

### 3 The Notion of Acquaintance

#### 3.1 Why Did Russell Reject Acquaintance?

Russell abandons his book *Theory of Knowledge* before completing it.<sup>13</sup> But he does not abandon acquaintance at this stage; indeed, that acquaintance is essential seems self-evident to him. But then in ‘On Propositions’ (1919)<sup>14</sup>, Russell gives up acquaintance saying only that he will no longer assume it as it is not “empirically discoverable”. Is this really his only reason? Acquaintance was essential to him before – without it a subject could not have knowledge of the world. Would he really reject it just because it was not empirically discoverable, if he took it to be playing a vital role? I think it is more plausible that Russell previously took acquaintance to be playing a role that he now decided it could not be playing.

I think acquaintance, for Russell, is doing two things. When a subject is acquainted with objects and relations in the world, these are present in his experience. It is being so present in his experience which makes it possible for the subject to think about them. In addition, it is these very things with which the subject is acquainted which are also combined in thought when a judgement is made. By being acquainted with particulars, relations and logical forms, the subject can combine these in thought to make judgements. His acquaintance with these things explains how judgements are made and how knowledge is possible. I do not think that there is anything wrong with the first role – that of objects being present in experience, making it possible for subjects to think of them. It is the second role – that of combining these objects and relations in thought – which is problematic. We then have the questions of what exactly is being combined in thought, and how is the subject acquainted with each element. This is particularly problematic when it comes to general thoughts. Russell does not actually talk about how a subject has general thoughts in (1913); he abandons the book before this point and discusses only “atomic propositional thought”. But what might it be for a subject to have a general thought, on his theory? Recall that in (1905) a subject who thinks (for example) that everything is blue must apprehend the proposition expressed by ‘*x is blue*’ is always true, or  $\forall x x$  is

<sup>13</sup> The speculation is that he abandoned it because Wittgenstein pointed out to him that his theory made it possible to judge nonsense.

<sup>14</sup> In *Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell* Vol 8, p294

blue. This involves being acquainted with each of the constituents of the proposition. By (1913) Russell no longer thinks that there are such things as propositions, but presumably he would think that for a subject to think that everything is blue, the subject would have to be acquainted with each of the terms in what Russell formerly thought of as a proposition, and combine these in thought. So the subject would have to be acquainted with the variable  $x$ , with the propositional function  $x$  is blue, and with *is always true* ( $\forall x$ ) (and with the logical form of the statement). He would then combine each of these in thought.

But then, of course, Russell cannot avoid the question of what it is to be acquainted with the variable.<sup>15</sup> The variable is part of the thought, combined with other things. And the way in which it becomes part of the thought, being there to combine with other elements, is by the subject being acquainted with it. Russell never manages to give a satisfactory answer to whether or how the subject is acquainted with the variable, and without this it seems he cannot explain how descriptive or general thought is possible. His aim was to explain how a subject has knowledge and makes judgements, and if he thinks acquaintance cannot be playing this role, it seems understandable that he would give up on it. Although Russell does not say this explicitly, I think this must be at least part of the reason why he rejects acquaintance.

The problem for Russell is his theory of knowledge – the way the subject combines things to make a judgement. The problem is not the relation of acquaintance *per se*. Of course, Russell's Multiple Relation Theory of Judgement is not the only way in which acquaintance may be given an explanatory role in thought. In Section 3.3 below I will briefly consider Campbell's (2002) proposal. But before that I want to focus on what I think is the first role of acquaintance for Russell – that when a subject is acquainted with objects, the objects are present to the subject in experience. It is being so present in his experience which makes it possible for the subject to think about them. In particular I want to focus on what it is to be acquainted with particular objects.

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<sup>15</sup> Or, for that matter, what it is to be acquainted with a propositional function.

### 3.2 Acquaintance with Particulars

Russell writes the following:

When an object is in my present experience, then I am acquainted with it; it is not necessary for me to reflect upon my experience, or to observe that the object has the property of belonging to my experience, in order to be acquainted with it, but, on the contrary, the object itself is known to me without the need of any reflection on my part as to its properties or relations. This point may perhaps be made clearer by an illustrative hypothesis. Suppose I were occupied, like Adam, in bestowing names upon various objects. The objects upon which I should bestow names would all be objects with which I was acquainted, but it would not be necessary for me to reflect that I was acquainted with them, or to realize that they all shared a certain relation to myself. What distinguishes the objects to which I can give names from other things is the fact that these objects are within my experience, that I am acquainted with them, but it is only subsequent reflection that proves that they all have this distinguishing characteristic; during the process of naming they appear merely as this, that, and the other. (Russell (1913), p39)

This is the notion of acquaintance with particulars which will be developed in the next chapter. The object is present to the subject in experience, and it is this which puts the subject in a position to be able to think of it. It is this which is essential for a subject to have non-first-personal thoughts about objects. But Russell (1911, 1912, 1913) thinks that the objects which can be present in experience to a subject are severely limited. By (1913) he thinks that the only particulars with which a subject can be acquainted are sense-data, of either the inner or outer sense. These are the only objects which the subject can name, with what Russell calls *logically proper names*. Hence these are the only objects which a subject can have singular thoughts about – all other thoughts concerning objects must be descriptive thoughts which denote an object. Is this a necessary result of taking the acquaintance relation between subject and object to be the converse of the object being present to the subject?

It is not. This limitation on the objects with which a subject can be acquainted is not a result of this understanding of acquaintance. It is not the case that Russell comes to the conclusion that a subject can only be acquainted with sense-data by analysing this notion of acquaintance. Instead, I think it is Russell's further role which he gives to acquaintance – that of explaining thought in his theory of knowledge – which results in this restriction. Russell thinks that to make a judgement the subject is acquainted with things in the world, and combines these

in thought. If the objects with which a subject could be acquainted were unrestricted then his thoughts that (e.g.) Hesperus is a planet and that Phosphorus is a planet would both be the same thought. Each would involve the subject being acquainted with the planet Venus and being acquainted with the property of being a planet, and combining these in thought. But a subject might believe one and not the other, and how could this be possible if they were the same thought? It is because of his theory of knowledge rather than his basic understanding of acquaintance that Russell thinks that what a subject is acquainted with must be severely restricted.<sup>16</sup>

This is not an issue if one accepts only Russell's understanding of acquaintance as an object being present to a subject, without accepting his theory of knowledge. The same object may be present to a subject in different ways. This does not mean that the object itself is not present in experience – only that the subject does not realize that it is the same object in each case.

### 3.3 Comparison with Campbell (2002)

Campbell starts his book *Reference and Consciousness* (2002) by saying:

It is experience of the world that puts us in a position to think about it. Without experience, we would not know what the world is like. (Campbell (2002), p1)

This is very similar to the role for acquaintance proposed in this thesis. It is objects being present in experience which enables subjects to think about objects. More specifically, Campbell takes *conscious attention* to an object to be what explains how a subject can think about an object demonstratively, and says that Russell's notion of acquaintance “provides a model” for conscious attention:

Russell thought of acquaintance as a cognitive relation more primitive than thought about an object, which nonetheless, by reaching all the way to the object, made thought about the object possible. I will argue that this provides a model for the way in which we think of conscious attention to an object. It is a state more primitive than thought about the object, which nonetheless, by bringing the object itself into the subjective life of the thinker, makes it possible to think about that object. (Campbell (2002), p6)

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<sup>16</sup> In the case of the self, Russell eventually reaches the conclusion that we are not acquainted with it because he thinks that it is not present in experience. He follows Hume in this respect. But this is not his reasoning for why we are not acquainted with other objects.

Like Russell, Campbell also appeals to what he calls a *Relational View* of experience. The content of a subject's perception are the objects and properties which he perceives, rather than representations of them. Campbell explains this by appealing to the 'view' a subject perceives. The constituents of the view are the objects and properties themselves. Campbell considers objections to this, the main one being the following:

I think that one powerful reason for resistance to the Relational View of experience is the thought that to characterize the content of an experience, it cannot be enough simply to say which object is being experienced: you must also say how the object is being experienced, you must characterize the way in which the object is being perceived by the subject. After all, two people could be seeing the very same object, and yet the intrinsic character of their experiences be quite different. This in itself is undeniable. It is the next step that leads to rejection of the Relational View. The next step is to say that the way in which the object is given is independent of whether the object exists, and independent of whether the subject is experiencing one or many similar objects. (Campbell (2002) p126)

Campbell's suggestion is that although the content of a subject's perception consists of the objects and properties which he perceives, this does not mean that they cannot be experienced in a certain way. The worry for objectors might also be that if a subject's thought is based on his experience, then how can he think about the same object in different ways if that object is part of the content of the thought?

But unlike Russell, Campbell does not describe the content of thought as a combination of objects and properties. Rather than talking about the content of a subject's thought he talks about the subject's capacity to use a singular term to refer to an object, his capacity to verify propositions involving the term, and his capacity to act on the basis of such propositions (e.g. p5, also Chapter 2, etc.). He thinks that by being acquainted with object – by consciously attending to the object – the underlying information-processing systems "swing into play":

It is the liaison between conscious attention and the underlying information processing subsystems which provides you with your capacity to use the term, to verify propositions involving a term, or to act on the basis of such propositions. (Campbell ((2002), p5)

Like Russell, however, Campbell's aim is not just to say what puts a subject in a position to think about the world, but to explain how it is that a subject can think

about the world. Campbell goes into great detail explaining the links he thinks there are between a subject's conscious attention to an object and the information-processing that goes on in the subject's brain.

Can Campbell's account succeed where Russell's Multiple Relation Theory of Judgement does not? Because the content of a thought or judgement need not involve a combination of objects and relations, the problems Russell has with the variable do not appear to be an issue for Campbell. But I will not explore Campbell's account any further here, as the details of it do not affect the main point to be argued for in this thesis. One may reject Campbell's account of how conscious attention links with the information-processing subsystems that enable one to have thoughts about objects, and yet still think that what is important for a subject to have a thought about an object is that he is acquainted with the object – that the object is present in his experience. The proposal in this thesis is that this is what is necessary for a subject to have non-first-personal thoughts about objects. And that this is not needed for the subject to think about himself first-personally. The following chapter aims to develop this notion of acquaintance, in order that this key difference between first-person and non-first-personal thought can be brought out in Part III.



## Chapter 4

### The Role of Acquaintance: Restricting Singular Thought

The aim of this thesis is not to explain exactly how thought, or even singular thought, is possible. Instead, it is to highlight a key difference between a subject's first-person thought, and his non-first-personal thought about independent objects. The proposal is that a subject's acquaintance with an object is essential for him to have a non-first-personal singular thought, and that this is not required for his first-person thoughts. The notion of acquaintance that brings out this distinction is basically that of Russell's:

I say that I am acquainted with an object when I have a direct cognitive relation to that object i.e. when I am directly aware of the object itself.... I think the relation of subject and object which I call acquaintance is simply the converse of the relation of object and subject which constitutes presentation... I wish to preserve the dualism of subject and object in my terminology, because this dualism seems to me a fundamental fact concerning cognition. (Russell (1911), p200-1)

For a subject to think about an object that object must in some way be present to him. For a subject to think first-personally, the object – himself – need not be present in this way.

The purpose of this chapter is to clarify what is meant by *an object being present* to a subject, and to explain why this should be a requirement for a subject to think about an object. I will begin by saying what I think the relation of acquaintance is *not*. It does not involve the subject knowing what kind of thing the object is, or having discriminating knowledge of the object. Instead, it is more like Evans's (1982) notion of information. Evans thinks that for a subject to be able to think certain types of singular thoughts – thoughts he calls *information-based particular thoughts* – a subject must have information from the object. I will argue that this information-link between subject and object is similar to an acquaintance relation. But having information from an object does not explain exactly how the subject is able to think about the object; it is a constraint on what objects the subject can think about. Having information from an object, or being acquainted with an object, puts the subject in a position to think about it. Purported counterexamples to the requirement that a subject must be acquainted with an object in order to have a singular thought about it will then

be considered. By showing why a subject does not have a singular thought in such cases, the reasons for an acquaintance requirement become clearer.

### 1 Acquaintance Does Not Involve *Knowing Which*

The restriction that a subject must be acquainted with an object in order to think of it is sometimes interpreted as meaning that a subject must *know which* object it is about which he is thinking. The following principle is called ‘Russell’s Principle’, by Evans (1982):

In order to be thinking about an object or to make a judgement about an object, one must *know which* object is in question – one must *know which* object it is that one is thinking about. (Evans (1982), p65)

Evans explicitly attributes this to Russell, and in a footnote asks the reader to see the section of Russell’s *Problems of Philosophy*, where Russell discusses his Principle of Acquaintance. McDowell ((1990), p257, and elsewhere) also suggests that Russell himself equates Russell’s Principle with his Principle of Acquaintance. Recall Russell’s Principle of Acquaintance is:

*Every proposition which we can understand must be composed wholly of constituents with which we are acquainted* (Russell (1911), p209; (1912), p32)

It is true that Russell justifies this principle by saying:

...it is scarcely conceivable that we can make a judgement or entertain a supposition without knowing what it is that we are judging or supposing about (Russell, (1911), p209; (1912), p32)<sup>1</sup>

But it is a misinterpretation of Russell to say that this means that a subject must *know which* object he is thinking of. Nowhere does Russell say this. He only says that the subject must *know what it is* that he is thinking about. This is knowledge of things – an expression Russell uses interchangeably with acquaintance, and with the converse of an object being present to a subject. Acquaintance as knowledge of things is contrasted by Russell with *knowledge of truths*:

The word ‘know’ is here used in two different senses. (1) In its first use it is applicable to the sort of knowledge which is opposed to error, the sense in which what we know is *true*, the sense which applies to our beliefs and convictions, i.e. to what are called *judgements*. In this sense of the word we know *that* something is the case. This sort of knowledge may be described as knowledge of *truths*. (2) In the second use of the word ‘know’ above, the word applies to our knowledge of *things*, which we may call acquaintance. This is the sense in which we know sense-data.

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<sup>1</sup> In (1911) the principle starts with “...it seems scarcely possible to believe...”

(The distinction is roughly that between *savoir* and *connaître* in French, or between *wissen* and *kennen* in German.) (Russell (1912), p23)

In his *Theory of Knowledge* (1913), Russell also describes a subject's acquaintance with an object as his knowing an object. For instance:

When an object is in my present experience, then I am acquainted with it; it is not necessary for me to reflect upon my experience, or to observe that the object has the property of belonging to my experience, in order to be acquainted with it, but, on the contrary, the *object itself is known to me* without the need of any reflection on my part as to its properties or relations. (Russell (1913), p39, my emphasis)

It is important to realize that Russell treats a subject's knowing an object as the same as that object being present to the subject. The fact that he uses the word 'know' does not mean that this is not the same as the object being present in experience. Knowing a thing is being acquainted with it, which is the same as the object being present to the subject. As has been discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis, by the object being present to the subject, the subject can think directly about the object. Knowledge of things grounds the subject's knowledge of truths. A subject's knowing which object it is does not come into it.

Thus I disagree with McDowell (1990) who suggests that Russell conflates 'know the object which...' and 'know which object....'. Russell himself makes no such conflation. But McDowell goes on to suggest that there could be a reason for such a conflation because the sorts of cognitive relations that must hold between subject and object in order for the subject to be acquainted with the object will also suffice for the satisfaction of the *know which* requirement. But this is not obviously the case. A subject may perceive a red apple. The object is present to him, and so he is acquainted with it. He can think about it. He may later perceive an identical-looking red apple and not realize it is a different apple. He is also acquainted with this apple. And yet he cannot tell the difference between the two apples; he does not have discriminating knowledge of them. If a subject's knowing which object he is thinking about is interpreted in terms of his having discriminating knowledge of the object, in this case he does not know which object he is thinking about. Yet he is acquainted with each apple in each case. Acquaintance and knowledge which do not coincide.

The proposal in this thesis is that for a subject to think about an object he must be acquainted with it – that object must be present to him. But are there reasons for

thinking that this is wrong and that instead it is a subject's knowing which object he is thinking of which is necessary for a subject's thought about an object? Sometimes a subject's knowing which object he is thinking of is understood as the subject knowing what kind of object he is thinking of. Thus we find Anscombe saying that one of the reasons a subject cannot refer to himself using 'I' is because he cannot associate a 'conception' with the term 'I'. She writes:

The use of a name for an object is connected with a conception of that object. And so we are driven to look for something that, for each 'I'-user, will be the conception related to the supposed name 'I', as the conception of a city is to the names 'London' and 'Chicago', that of a river to 'Thames' and 'Nile', that of a man to 'John' and 'Pat'. Such a conception is requisite if 'I' is a name. (Anscombe (1975), p141)

By associating a conception with a term, the subject thinks of the kind of thing the object referred to is. Dummett (1973) also holds this view. According to him, we cannot single out an object if we do not know what kind of thing it is; in just pointing to something we do not single out an object, as several kinds of object could occupy the same location. For instance, both a statue and a lump of clay can occupy the same location. Until we are able to single out the object, we cannot think of it. This possibly has some plausibility if one thinks of reality as an "amorphous mass", as Dummett ((1973), p577) does, where objects are not present to a subject, but the subject must instead use his knowledge of kinds to single them out. But it loses its plausibility if one supposes that objects are indeed given or present to the subject. It seems that a subject can think about and refer to an object *before* he comes to know what kind it is. He can be radically mistaken about what kind of thing he is observing, for instance. A subject may think 'This is a live animal' when in fact what is in front of him is a stuffed toy. That the subject needs to know what kind of thing he is referring to is opposed by many: Ayers (1974), Hirsch (1982), Campbell (2002) and Sainsbury (2007) to name but a few. Hirsch provides an illustration, describing a child who has grown up never having seen any vehicles. When he first sees a car, being driven so fast that it looks all blurred, even though he does not know what kind of object it is he can nevertheless refer to that *big blue thing*. Perhaps it is possible that after thinking about an object the subject usually comes to know what kind of thing an object is, and associates this knowledge with the object when he thinks about it. But this does not seem necessary to refer to the object in the first place. In thinking about an object the subject may be radically mistaken about the

object's properties. He is not having a descriptive thought, concerning an object which satisfies some description or has some specific properties. Instead he is thinking of, and referring to, an object which is present to him,

In at least some cases Evans (e.g. (1982), p178-9) agrees that a subject can be "radically mistaken" about the kind of thing one is thinking about, and still succeed in having a singular thought. However, he interprets a subject knowing which object he is thinking of as the requirement that the subject have *discriminating knowledge* of the object. This means that the subject must either know what differentiates the object from all other objects, or he must have the ability to work this out. In some cases – for instance, abstract objects – this does involve knowing what kind of thing the object is. In other cases, it does not, provided that a "definitely extended object is indicated" (p178-9). In the case of a physical object the proposal is that the subject needs to think of the object as temporally and spatially located, and have the ability to locate the object. By being able to do this he can distinguish the object from others and thus can think about it.<sup>2</sup>

According to Evans, in order to think of an object, a subject must have an Idea of an object, where he defines *Idea* in the following way:

An Idea of an object, then, is something which makes it possible for a subject to think of an object in a series of indefinitely many thoughts, in each of which he will be thinking of the object in the same way (Evans (1982), p104).

Evans thinks that to have an Idea of an object *a*, the subject must have either a fundamental Idea *a* – where he thinks of *a* as possessing the fundamental ground of difference it possesses, and so knows what distinguishes *a* from all other objects – or he must know what it would be for his Idea of *a* to equate to a fundamental Idea of *a*. Evans attempts to defend this position in Chapter 4 of *The Varieties of Reference*, particularly Section 4.4. He starts from the point (p106) that all objects are distinguished from one another in certain fundamental ways. It seems that Evans is aiming to give an account of reference which will also apply to abstract objects, although it is not clear that the examples he

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<sup>2</sup> I do not consider abstract objects. My proposal is limited to concrete objects; that to think about an independent concrete object a subject must be acquainted with it.

discusses initially are obviously abstract objects. For instance, the examples he gives are:

...we may say that shades of colour are distinguished from one another by their phenomenal properties, that shapes are distinguished from one another by their geometrical properties, that sets are differentiated from one another by their possessing different members, that numbers are differentiated from one another by their positions in an infinite ordering, and that chess positions are distinguished from one another by the positions of pieces upon the board. ((1982), p106-7)

Whilst on many views, sets and numbers are abstract objects, it is far from obvious that shades of colour or shapes are. Let us leave this to one side. The key point is that Evans first explores reference to abstract objects because he wishes to distinguish his position from verificationism, which cannot account for such reference. But this attention to abstract objects leads him to focus on things which are not really relevant to a subject's thought about non-abstract objects. It may be plausible that to think of the number 3, a subject must think of it as the third number in the series of numbers, and so thinks of it in a way in which it is discriminated from all other numbers. But is having discriminating knowledge of an object really necessary for a subject's thought about a concrete object?

Evans tries to defend his case that fundamental Ideas are involved in some way in all thoughts about objects by considering a general thought of the form *some G is F*. He proposes that there is no thought about objects of a certain kind which does not presuppose the idea of one object of that kind ((1982), p108). So it seems that if I were to think that some number is odd then I must think that some object individuated by the fundamental ground of difference appropriate to numbers is odd. Evans thinks that it is not knowledge of the fundamental ground of difference for a particular object which is important for a subject to have a general thought – so not knowledge, for example, that three is the third object along the infinite ordering. Instead, he thinks that the subject must have knowledge of the fundamental ground of difference in general – in the case of numbers the fundamental ground of difference is their position along an infinite ordering. Does this also apply to physical objects? Although at this point in the argument Evans is thinking of abstract objects, he later wants to extend the argument to spatio-temporal objects, so I think these considerations about general thoughts must also apply to general thoughts which may denote physical

objects. So, for the sake of argument, suppose that if I were to think that some cat is tabby then I must think that some object, individuated by the fundamental ground of difference appropriate to cats, is tabby. But this seems to be an explanation of what it is to think of something as having the property of being a cat – what it is to satisfy some description. But what does this tell us about singular thoughts? As yet, this does not seem to tell us anything at all about what it is to think about particular objects. If a subject thinks that some number is odd, or that some cat is tabby, then this seems to be of the form  $\exists x. Gx \ \& \ Fx$ . Perhaps to know this the subject needs to know what it is for something to be a  $G$ , but this does not seem to tell us what it is to think of a particular object.

Evans thinks that to think a general thought of the form  $\exists x. Gx \ \& \ Fx$  one must think of “an  $F$  thing which is differentiated from all other objects by a ground of difference appropriate to  $G$ s.” (p108). This in itself is highly debatable. But assume for a moment that there is some truth in it. Evans thinks that this same point applies to particular thoughts about  $G$ s (p109) because he thinks that such thoughts also involve the idea of a  $G$ ’s being  $F$ . But do they really? There seems no reason to say that such thoughts must involve the idea of a  $G$ ’s being  $F$  unless one is already subscribing to Russell’s Principle – that to have a thought about an object one must know which object it is. Yet Evans insists that the fundamental level of thought is initially supposed to be independent of Russell’s Principle.

One of the reasons Evans thinks the fundamental level of thought is important is because he thinks that it can explain how a subject’s thought can be subject to the *Generality Constraint*.<sup>3</sup> This is the requirement that if a subject can think the thought that  $a$  is  $F$  and can think that  $b$  is  $G$ , then he can also think that  $a$  is  $G$  and  $b$  is  $F$ . If he can think that  $a$  is  $F$ , so thinking of and referring to object  $a$ , then he must also be able to think of  $a$  as having different properties, and must be able to think of the property  $F$  as applying to different objects (Evans (1982), p75, p101). To be able to think  $a$  is  $F$ ,  $a$  is  $G$ ,  $a$  is  $H$  etc., Evans argues that a subject must either have a fundamental Idea of  $a$ , or know what it would be for his Idea of  $a$  to equate to a fundamental Idea of  $a$ :

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<sup>3</sup> For an argument that the Generality Constraint is itself false, see Travis (1994)

Provided a subject knows what it is for identifications like  $[\delta = a]$  [where  $\delta$  is a fundamental Idea of an object] to be true, a link is set up between his Idea  $a$ , and his entire repertoire of conceptual knowledge, and he will be able to grasp as many propositions of the form  $[a \text{ is } F]$  as he has concepts of being  $F$ . His Ideas make contact with his concepts [of properties] so to speak, at the fundamental level, and hence there is no need, or possibility, of accounting for his knowledge of what it is for propositions about the object to be true one by one. (Evans (1982), p112)

But even if an appeal to a fundamental level of thought can explain how a subject's thought can conform to the Generality Constraint, this is not the only way it could so conform. Whatever it is that enables the subject to think about a particular object may be the same in each thought about it. The fundamental level of thought is not the only way of explaining this.

What it comes down to is that Evans thinks that a subject who cannot discriminate between two objects cannot have singular thoughts about them. In the example of the subject who is acquainted with two different apples, but cannot tell them apart, Evans thinks that subject cannot have a thought about either apple. But why should this be? Evans ((1982), p90) gives a similar example, describing the case of a subject who sees a steel ball rotating, and then on a different day sees an identical-looking steel ball rotating. We are also supposed to assume that the subject forgets about the first ball, because of a head injury. Evans assumes, rightly it seems, that the subject cannot discriminate between the two balls. He thinks that in this case the subject cannot be having a singular thought about the ball he remembers seeing. Evans says:

...there is nothing...he can do which will show that his thought is really about one of the two balls (about *that* ball) rather than about the other. (Evans (1982), p115)

But why should a subject need to be able to do something to show that he is thinking of one object rather than another? Sainsbury (2007) suggests this requirement comes from a "residual verificationism" in Evans work. But there seems no independent reason for thinking that a subject thinking of a red apple must be able to show that he is thinking of one object rather than another. The fact that he is acquainted with that particular apple – a particular red apple is present to him – is enough to make the subject's thought about that apple.



A subject's knowing which object he is thinking of is not the same as the subject being acquainted with the object. The proposal in this thesis is that, in the case of non-first-personal thoughts about independent objects, it is a subject's acquaintance with an object which is necessary for him to think about and refer to the object – he does not need to know which object he is thinking about.

## 2 Acquaintance and Information Compared

The notion of acquaintance which I propose is essential to singular thought is much more like Evans's notion of *information*.<sup>4</sup> According to Evans, many, but not all, singular thoughts involve the subject having (a bit of) information from the object he is thinking of.<sup>5</sup> Evans says:

We can speak of a certain bit of information being of, or perhaps from, an object, in a sense resembling the way in which we speak of a photograph being of an object ((1982), p124)

A subject can have information from an object by perceiving the object. He may receive information from others about the object – information can be transmitted in communication. And information can be retained in memory.

Evans specifies the *content* of information from an object in the same way that he specifies the *content* of a photograph of an object. He says:

I shall suppose for the moment that this content can be specified neutrally, by an open sentence in one or more variables (the number of variables corresponding to the number of objects in the photograph). Thus if we are concerned with a photograph of a red ball on top of a yellow square, then the content of the photograph can be represented by the open sentence

Red(*x*) & Ball(*x*) & Yellow(*y*) & Square(*y*) and On Top Of(*x*,*y*)  
((1982), p124-5)

In other places Evans also suggests that informational content can be existential.<sup>6</sup> However, he always makes it clear that he does not think that the specification of content should involve reference to the object it is about (e.g. p125). This may lead one to think that the information does not involve the object it is about, and so that the object itself is not essential to the information. This would be very

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<sup>4</sup> For further discussion on Evans's notion of information see Martin (2002), particularly Section 5.

<sup>5</sup> Exceptions to this are supposed to be thoughts involving descriptive names. See below, Section 3.1, for discussion.

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, (1982) p127 where a subject receives the information that there is a native with a spike through his nose

different from the notion of acquaintance proposed in this thesis. For example, the content of the information from two identical twins wearing exactly the same clothes may be identical. This may look similar to (e.g.) Bach's (1987) understanding of modes of presentations of objects, where the mode of presentation of an object does not determine a particular object. If the content of the information is the same from each twin, and the subject's thought depends on this content, then his thought will be the same no matter which twin he is thinking of. The context would determine which twin is being thought about, but this is not essential to the thought.

Such an interpretation of Evans would be mistaken. Evans is very careful to distinguish between the *content* of the information and the bit of information itself. Although the content of the information does not involve the presentation of a particular object, there is an information link between subject and object, consisting of information from the object which is received (or gathered) by the subject. If there is an object which is the source of the information, this object is essential to the information. As Evans says:

...the notion of the same (bit or piece of) information...deserves explanation, even though it is common....We want to be able to say that two informational states (states of different persons) embody the same information, provided that they result from the same informational event..., even if they do not have the same *content*: the one may represent the same information as the other, but *garbled* in various ways. Conversely, and obviously, it is not sufficient, for two informational states to embody the same information, that they have the same content. When two states embody *the same information*, they are necessarily such that if the one is of an object *x*, then so is the other. (Evans (1982), p128-9)

This notion of information is very similar to Russell's notion of acquaintance as an object being present to a subject. It differs from acquaintance in that information for Evans is supposed to be non-conceptual. This is not a concern for Russell – he moves quite easily between saying that a subject *knows* an object, and that the object is present to the subject in experience. Information also differs from Russell's notion of acquaintance in that it can be from no object. In contrast, Russell thinks that the objects of acquaintance cannot be “illusory” or “unreal” as:

An acquaintance which is acquainted with nothing is not an acquaintance but a mere absurdity. (Russell (1913), p48)

For Russell, if there is no object, there is no acquaintance, and so no singular thought. But for Evans, if there is no object, there can still be information; perhaps the information system is malfunctioning in some way, resulting in hallucination.<sup>7</sup> But if it is from an object, it is necessarily from that object – the information links the subject and object, or the object is present to the subject. This is the same as Russell's notion of acquaintance.

In Chapter 3, Section 3.2, it was suggested that a subject can be acquainted with an object in two different ways, resulting in different thoughts about this object. Thus, for example, a subject can think about Hesperus and Phosphorus without realizing that they are the same object, but he is still acquainted with the planet Venus in each case. Russell does not allow for this, but this is because of his theory of judgement involving the combination of objects and relations, rather than the role of acquaintance. Does Evans's notion of information allow for this possibility? Evans certainly allows that a subject may have two different Ideas of the same object, but this is because the subject identifies the object in two different ways. But presumably he identifies the object in two different ways because the information – not the *content* of the information – is different in each case. Two informational states embody the same information provided that they result from the same informational event. This does not mean that they embody the same information provided that they result from the same object. A subject's perception of Phosphorus in the morning and his perception of Hesperus in the evening are different information events, resulting in different information. "When two states embody the same information, they are necessarily such that if the one is of an object *x*, then so is the other" (p128). This does not mean that if two information states are of object *x* then they must embody the same information. Thus understanding acquaintance along the lines of Evans's notion of information, and taking this to be the necessary condition for thought also allows for a subject to have two different thoughts about the same object having the same property. The subject has different information from the object, and there is a different information link in each case.

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<sup>7</sup> The subject still cannot have a singular thought in this case according to Evans, because he does not know which object he is thinking about.

It is worth noting that if information can be from nothing this leaves open the possibility of a subject being able to have a singular thought where there is no object. For instance, he may be hallucinating and his information comes from nothing. That a subject can have a singular thought in such a case is denied by Evans, as there is no object for the subject to discriminate or identify, and so the condition in Russell's Principle is not met. But if, as is proposed in this thesis, discriminating knowledge of an object is not required for singular thought, and it is information which is important, then perhaps singular thought with no reference is possible. Of course, a hallucination which seems to the subject as if he were perceiving an object will not result in the same thought as a perception of an identical-looking object. In the first case, nothing is presented, while in the second case an object is presented. This will make the two thoughts different. As the point of this thesis is to say what is necessary for a subject to have a singular thought about an *object*, rather than whether he can be in a similar state of mind if there is no object, this will not be pursued further here. But there seems no reason in principle why a subject could not have a singular thought which is the result of the information system malfunctioning.<sup>8</sup>

I think that a subject can be acquainted with an object – the object can be present to him – in the same kinds of cases in which Evans proposes that a subject can have information from an object. The paradigm of an acquaintance relation is perception; by perceiving an object the subject is in a position to think about it. Acquaintance can also be retained in memory. This does not mean that the subject somehow 'perceives' the object in memory. Instead, the fact that he has once perceived the object and retains this in memory is enough for him to think about it. Even if he misremembers the object – perhaps he remembers it as yellow and it was red – he is still thinking about the object originally perceived. The object remembered is the one that was perceived and which led to the memory, not the one which fits the description. Acquaintance transmitted through testimony is probably the most problematic case. It may seem that if a subject is told 'Mary is sitting down' and does not himself perceive Mary, then he can think of Mary only by description. To think of Mary by description the

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<sup>8</sup> For further discussion on this see Sainsbury (2007), especially his final chapter on mental reference. Sainsbury argues that there can be mental reference in the absence of a referent, although he does not think that acquaintance is necessary for reference.

subject might think of her as the person the speaker is telling him about, and this would be a descriptive thought rather than a singular thought. But in many cases, names do not work like this. An object is originally given a name by a person who is acquainted with it, most usually via perception. Kripke (1972) calls this a *dubbing* or a *baptism*. The original user of the name receives information from the object. He can pass this information on by using the name to refer to the object. A hearer being told about this object by the speaker's use of the name receives information – the information is transmitted by the use of the name. So, for instance, a subject may be told 'Mary is the best student in the class'. Through the use of the name, the object Mary is presented to him. He can think about her. The information he receives is that she is the best student in the class. But even if the content of this information turns out to be false – perhaps Mary is a very poor student – the subject can still think about Mary.

I do not pretend to have given anything like a full account of the different ways a subject can be acquainted with an object here. The above is only a brief sketch. But I think that in such cases the subject is acquainted with an object – he has an information link with the object – and this puts him in a position to think about the object. Without having information from the object – without the object being present to him – the subject cannot have a singular thought about that object.

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### 3 Is Acquaintance Necessary?

A subject can think about and refer to an object if he is acquainted with that object. The fact that the object is present in his experience enables his thought to be about that object, rather than another one. But is this condition really necessary? Is there any reason why a subject could not have a singular thought about an object he has never encountered and has never been told about?

Crimmins (1992) argues that there is no reason why this could not happen. He suggests, for example, that a subject's thought expressed by the sentence 'The shortest spy is a spy' can be a singular thought about an object even if the subject is not acquainted with the shortest spy. Crimmins believes that a thought or belief is about an object if it contains a *notion* of an object. Crimmins says

explicitly that one need not be acquainted with an object in order to have a notion of it, although he also admits that he does not have a general account of notion content ((1992), p80). His view is that it is very easy for a notion to be of an object; he calls this a “promiscuous account of notion content” (e.g. p89). His aim is not to explain exactly how this is possible, but instead to refute the claim that acquaintance is necessary for a notion to be *of* an object. Crimmins suggests a reliabilist account, where a subject may first have a general belief that there is a unique object fulfilling a certain property. And the having of this general belief can then lead to the subject possessing a new notion of the object:

To have a notion of a thing, arguably, is to have an at-least-tacit belief that it exists (not necessarily that it exists *now*), and (on a reliabilist theory of knowledge) this belief will count as knowledge that the thing exists if the original general belief itself counts as knowledge. (Crimmins, (1992), p89)

Crimmins accepts that there are general thoughts, which differ from particular thoughts about objects. So the thought *the shortest spy is a spy*, may be a general thought, which is satisfied by the object who fulfils the description the shortest spy. But unlike the view proposed in this thesis, Crimmins also proposes that a subject can have a particular belief about the shortest spy, even if he is not acquainted with the individual who is the shortest spy. If a subject’s belief about the shortest spy does not contain a notion then it is a general belief, but if it contains a notion then it is a singular belief about the person who is the shortest spy. But can it really be that simple to form a notion of an object, and so think of an object?

Crimmins accepts that many have the intuition that a subject cannot form notions of an object unless he is acquainted with it, but he thinks that this can be explained by the fact that notions of objects with which a subject is not acquainted are not often *useful*. He gives an analogy of FBI file folders ((1992), p87-8) where a file is opened to track down a suspect. Crimmins believes there is no reason why the FBI could not open a file for ‘the heaviest person who will commit murder next year’. He argues that this file is about this person, even though the FBI is not acquainted with this person. However, the file is not useful as it cannot link to other information. It cannot be tied up with other information about the suspect, or be used to direct an action towards the suspect. But

Crimmins thinks that this does not mean that such files are not *about* the individual in question “...so long as we understand the force of the practical constraint: they are useless files.” ((1992), p88) He argues that the same is true of notions:

...the significant possibility of recognition – of connecting new beliefs, perceptions, intentions and actions to a pre-existing notion – is an important practical constraint on the formation of notions. There is no reason to form an idle notion: a notion that one is not significantly likely to connect in the future to the thing it is a notion of. Notice that this is not a conceptual restriction about what is required for having a notion that is truly *of* a thing. It is undeniable that we typically form beliefs truly about individuals only when we are related to them in a more or less intimate manner. And *this* fact falls out directly from a simple constraint on the usefulness of forming a notion of an individual. ((1992), p88)

The only problem that Crimmins sees for such “promiscuous” notions is that they are “useless” – they cannot link up with other information about the object. But can a subject really have such a notion of an object in the first place? What is it that makes his thought about one object rather than another? Why is his thought that the shortest spy is a spy not just a general thought about whatever happens to be the shortest spy?

I will return to Crimmins’s “promiscuous” notions below.<sup>9</sup> But first I want to consider views which enable a subject to have singular thoughts without acquaintance, yet which are not quite as promiscuous as Crimmins’s suggestion. These are thoughts which a subject comes to have by accepting sentences containing *descriptive names* (Evans (1979), (1982)) and *dthat-terms* (Kaplan (1978) (1989a), (1989b)). Descriptive names and dthat-terms are supposed to be singular terms which refer to objects, and the subject is supposed to be able to think about the objects referred to by understanding a sentence containing the descriptive name or dthat-term. Evans (1982) and Kaplan (1989a) propose that in understanding such singular terms, the subject can have a singular thought, even when he is not acquainted with the object. I think this is wrong. Such thoughts are not singular thoughts. Either they are a variety of descriptive thought, where the object which satisfies the description is the same in each counterfactual situation, or the singular term in the sentence accepted has not

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<sup>9</sup> See section 3.3. of this chapter.

been properly introduced, so whatever the subject is thinking in accepting such a sentence he is not thinking a singular thought.

### 3.1 Descriptive Names

First let us consider the case of the descriptive name. In 'Reference and Contingency' (1979) and also in *The Varieties of Reference* ((1982), Chapter 2), Evans introduces the descriptive name 'Julius' by the stipulation:

(D) Let us use 'Julius' to refer to whoever invented the zip (e.g. (1979), p181)

By this stipulation, Evans builds into the descriptive name that it is a referring term, and that it will refer to whoever, in the actual world, invented the zip. A subject counts as understanding the name when he understands the description 'the inventor of the zip'. He does not have to know anything about the person who invented the zip, and this person does not have to be present in his experience in any way. But because the descriptive name 'Julius' is stipulated to be a referring term, it behaves in a different way to the description 'the inventor of the zip' in modal contexts. 'Julius invented the zip' is contingently true, because the descriptive name 'Julius' refers to the same person – the person who actually invented the zip – in all possible worlds, and in some possible worlds this person did not invent the zip. 'The inventor of the zip invented the zip' is true in all possible worlds. 'The inventor of the zip' is not a rigid expression, and its denotation is not constant across worlds.

Evans thinks that descriptions are not referring terms, primarily because of their modal behaviour. For instance, the following sentence seems to be ambiguous:

The first man in space might have been an American (Evans (1979), p189; (1982), p55)

It can mean either that the person who was actually the first man in space – Uri Gagarin – might have been an American. Or it can mean that an American, someone other than Gagarin, might have been the first man in space. In other words, there is a possible world in which the man who is the first man in space in *that* world is an American in that world. Names and descriptive names, on the other hand, only permit one reading:

Uri Gagarin might have been an American

Julius might have been an American



In each case the denotation of the name remains constant across possible worlds. Evans explains reference as the relation between expression and objects which makes the following true:

(P) If  $R(t_1 \dots t_n)$  is atomic, and  $t_1 \dots t_n$  are referring expressions, then  $R(t_1 \dots t_n)$  is true iff  $\langle \text{the referent of } t_1, \dots, \text{the referent of } t_n \rangle$  satisfies  $R$ . ((1979), p184)

Evans says of (P) that it simultaneously defines reference and satisfaction in terms of truth ((1979), p184). He thinks that any name or expression whose contribution to the sentence in which it occurs is stated by the above relation of reference is a referring term. Proper names and descriptive names both contribute to the sentences in which they occur in this way. For proper names, their semantic contribution is their referent, as stated in clauses such as:

The referent of 'Mary' = Mary

For descriptive names we have clauses such as:

$\forall x(\text{the referent of 'Julius'} = x \leftrightarrow x \text{ uniquely invented the zip})$

This clause uses only the relation of reference in (P), and together with clauses for predicates, will give us truth conditions for sentences containing 'Julius'. Because 'Julius' can sometimes be empty, Evans accepts that we need to adopt a negative free logic if we are to have such terms as referring terms, with modification to existential generalization and universal instantiation. But he does not think that this is a problem. If we try to assign a reference to definite descriptions using a principle like (P)<sup>10</sup> we capture only one reading of a sentence like "The first man in space might have been American". It is primarily for such reasons that Evans thinks that descriptive names refer, but definite descriptions do not.

But Evans admits that we could treat definite descriptions as referring expressions if we relativize the relation of reference to a possible world.

However, Evans does not want to do this. He says:

Simply in order to assimilate descriptions to referring expressions, we introduce a major change in the semantic apparatus in terms of which we describe the functioning of referring expressions in general. As a consequence of this change, we ascribe to names, pronouns and demonstratives semantical properties of a *type* which would allow them to get up to tricks they never in fact get up to; since their reference never

<sup>10</sup> Actually, a principle like (P) modified to connect reference with the notion of truth with respect to a world

varies from world to world, this semantic power is never exploited.  
(Evans (1982), p56)

So the reason Evans does not want to treat descriptions as referring terms is because their reference varies from world to world. According to him, the reference of descriptive names does not vary from world to world. But is there really any reason to think of them as referring terms, rather than as descriptions whose denotation does not vary from world to world?

In fact, Bostock ((1988), p367) has suggested that it is wrong to treat descriptive names as having the same denotation in each possible world. He thinks it is wrong to treat the so-called reference of the name – the actual inventor of the zip – as what must be held constant across possible worlds:

The fact is that where an expression does have a sense as well as a reference...and where we would also say that its sense determines its reference, then we just do count as preserving the sense as the right way to preserve the 'meaning' of that expression for modal purposes.  
(Bostock (1988), p368)

But suppose we accept that Evans is entitled to stipulate that 'Julius' refers to the same object – the actual inventor of the zip – in all possible worlds. The result here seems to be to treat the name 'Julius' as equivalent to the description 'the actual inventor of the zip'.<sup>11</sup> 'Actual' is a rigidifier – its role is to refer us back to the way things are in the actual world, no matter what possible worlds are being talked about. Even if it is accepted that a term can have such properties, is there any reason to think a subject accepting a sentence containing such a term has a singular thought about an object?

In *The Varieties of Reference* (1982) it certainly seems that Evans thinks so. Indeed, accepting sentences containing descriptive names seems to be the one exception to his view that a subject must have information from an object in order to refer to it. Evans is always very clear that he thinks singular thought (or as he calls it, particular-thought) is distinct from a descriptive thought, even if only one object is denoted by the description. For instance he says:

...I mean to give expression to the view that the particular-thought and the existential thought are different in *content*: the thought that some *G* is *F* does not become a particular thought because there happens to be only one *G*. ((1982), p110, n33)

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<sup>11</sup> This suggestion is made by Davies and Humberstone (1980), although Evans himself does not specify that the name is equivalent to the rigidified description.

But he then goes on to say:

We are characterizing a purely formal difference between thoughts which will allow the thought that Julius is *F* (...) to be a particular-thought. If the object of the Idea  $\delta^*$  invented the zip, then only the truth of the proposition [ $\delta^*$  is *F*] is capable, as things stand, of making it true that Julius is *F* (though of course, since many individuals might have invented the zip, there are many propositions of the form [ $\delta$  is *F*] that might, in some absolute sense, have made it true that Julius is *F*). ((1982), p110, n33)

Recall from Section 2 that Evans holds that for most singular thought the subject must have information from the object, *and* must know which object it is; he must have discriminating knowledge of the object. But according to Evans, the essential notion for a subject's being able to have a singular thought about an object is that he has discriminating knowledge of the object – that he conforms to what Evans calls *Russell's Principle*. And Evans seems to think that this can occur in the case of descriptive names without information. The description is supposed to enable the subject to identify the object, by the subject knowing distinguishing facts about the object.<sup>12</sup>

Despite what Evans thinks in (1982), I think much of his work in 'Reference and Contingency' (1979) is aimed precisely at showing that a subject who accepts a sentence containing a descriptive name does *not* have a singular thought. In this work, which is a precursor to work on two-dimensional semantics, Evans argues that the epistemological content of a sentence should be distinguished from its modal content. He says:

I shall not attempt to give an analysis of the notion of [epistemological] content here; I want to rely upon the intuitive sense according to which, if two sentences have the same content, then what is believed by one who understands and accepts the one sentence as true is the same as what is believed by one who understands and accepts the other sentence as true. On this, very strict, view of sameness of content, if two sentences have the same content, and a person understands both, then he cannot believe what one sentence says and disbelieve what the other sentence says. When two sentences meet this condition, I shall say that they are epistemically equivalent. ((1979), p200)

Evans's notion of epistemological content is something like Dummett's notion of assertoric content. Dummett (e.g. in 'Meaning in Terms of Justification' (2002)

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<sup>12</sup> In fact, even by Evans's standards, I am not sure that a subject's understanding descriptive names should count as fulfilling Russell's Principle – the subject grasps a criterion for applying the name, but does he really know which object is referred to? (cf Bostock (1988), p370)

and elsewhere) says that to understand the assertoric content of a sentence the subject must know what is conveyed by a speaker who on any occasion uses it on its own to make a statement (p18). Dummett contrasts this with the ingredient sense of a sentence; to grasp this, the subject must grasp the contribution it makes to determining the assertoric content of any more complex sentence in which it is embedded. For instance, the sentences 'It is raining here', and 'It is raining where I am' have both the same (epistemological) content (Evans) and assertoric content (Dummett). What is believed by one who understands and accepts one as true, is believed by one who understands and accepts the other as true. Or as Dummett would put it, a speaker uttering either sentence would convey the same information to the hearer. Embedded, they may well give us sentences which have different assertoric contents – for instance, 'It is always raining here' and 'It is always raining where I am' do not have the same assertoric content, as 'here' is temporally rigid while 'where I am' is not. Thus the embedded sentences have different ingredient senses. In a similar way, Evans argues that the sentences 'Julius is *F*' and 'The inventor of the zip is *F*' have the same epistemic content, even though they embed differently under modal operators:

We know that the sentences 'Julius is *F*' and 'The inventor of the zip is *F*' are associated with different propositions [a function from possible worlds to truth values in a possible worlds semantics]... . Nevertheless, it seems clear that the two sentences are epistemically equivalent.....Belief states are individuated by the evidence which gives rise to them, the expectations, behaviour, and further beliefs which may be based upon them, and in all of these respects the belief states associated with the two sentences are indistinguishable. We do not get ourselves into new belief states by 'the stroke of a pen' (in Grice's phrase) – simply by introducing a name into the language. ((1979), p202)

This seems to be an argument for the case that a subject accepting a sentence such as 'Julius is *F*' does *not* have a singular thought. Evans agrees that the subject's thought is equivalent to the thought that he would have if he accepted the sentence 'The inventor of the zip is *F*', and that this is a general thought which denotes an object – it is not a singular thought. Consider again the suggestion that the name 'Julius' is equivalent to the rigidified description 'the actual inventor of the zip'. This description denotes only (and at most) one object, and the object remains constant across possible worlds, because the denotation is always the inventor of the zip in the actual world. But why should

a subject have to be thinking about an object in order to understand this description? Evans is always very clear that a general thought differs from a singular thought in content, even if only one object is denoted by the general thought.

Descriptive names are not a counterexample to the proposal that for a subject to have a singular thought about an object he must be acquainted with the object. A subject can understand a descriptive name without being acquainted with the object it denotes, because he understands the description. This is a case of descriptive, or general thought, rather than singular thought.

### 3.2 Dthat-Terms

Dthat-terms are supposed to be another counterexample to the proposal that to think about and refer to an object the subject must be acquainted with the object. They differ from descriptive names in that their meaning is supposed to be only the object referred to – there is supposed to be no descriptive content. Kaplan introduces the term in his article ‘Dthat’ (1978): ‘dthat[ $\alpha$ ]’ is supposed to be a directly referential term (one whose meaning is only the object referred to) whose reference is the denotation of ‘ $\alpha$ ’, where ‘ $\alpha$ ’ is a description or a singular term. But  $\alpha$  is not part of the meaning of ‘dthat[ $\alpha$ ]’ – it serves only to fix the reference. Kaplan explains the reasoning behind introducing such a term as follows:

Recall that we earlier regarded demonstrations, which are required to ‘complete’ demonstratives, as a kind of description. The demonstrative was then treated as a directly referential term whose referent was the demonstratum of the associated demonstration.

Now why not regard descriptions as a kind of demonstration, and introduce a special demonstrative which requires completion by a description and which is treated as a directly referential term whose referent is the denotation of the associated description? Why not? Why not indeed! I have done so... ((1989a), p521)

Kaplan thinks that sentences formed using ‘dthat [ $\alpha$ ]’ will refer directly to objects. As an example, ‘dthat [the first child to be born in the 21<sup>st</sup> century]’ will refer to that child, so any sentence containing the term will refer to the child.

Kaplan also thinks that such objects can be named:

My liberality with respect to the introduction of directly referring terms by means of ‘dthat’ extends to proper names, and I would allow an arbitrary definite description to *give* us the object we name. “Let’s call

the first child to be born in the twenty-first century ‘Newman 1’” ((1989a), p560, n76).

‘Newman 1’ and ‘dthat [the first child to be born in the 21<sup>st</sup> century]’ are both supposed to be singular terms which refer to an object despite the fact that a subject is not acquainted with the object. And not only can the terms refer to an object, but any subject understanding a sentence containing such terms can come to have beliefs about the object – he can have singular thoughts about it – despite not being acquainted with it. Kaplan writes:

The introduction of a new proper name by means of a dubbing in terms of description and the active contemplation of characters involving dthat-terms – two mechanisms for providing direct reference to the denotation of an arbitrary definite description – constitute a form of cognitive restructuring; they broaden our range of thought. ((1989a), p560, n76)

In the descriptive names case I have argued that the subject does not have a singular thought, but instead has a general or descriptive thought, where the object denoted (if there is one) is the same in each possible world. But Kaplan’s dthat-terms are not supposed to be like this. They are supposed to be directly referential. However, in ‘Afterthoughts’ (1989b) Kaplan realizes that ‘dthat’ is not always interpreted in this way:

On one interpretation, “dthat” is a directly referential singular term and the content of the associated description is no part of the content of the dthat-term. On another interpretation, “dthat” is syntactically an operator that requires syntactical completion by a description in order to form a singular term. (1989b, p579)

If interpreted as a syntactically complete singular term, then the content of the dthat-term is its denotation. It is the object picked out by the description that is ‘taken around’ each possible world. But if interpreted as an operator then the content is not the referent but is instead something like an actualized description.

As Kaplan puts it:

In this case the proposition would not carry the individual itself into a possible world but rather would carry instructions to run back home and get the individual who there satisfies certain specifications. The complete dthat-term would then be a rigid description which induces a complex ‘representation’ of the referent into the content; it would not be directly referential. (Kaplan (1989b), p580)

If this were the correct interpretation then, just as in the case of descriptive names, a subject understanding a sentence including a dthat-term would just involve him understanding a description. This need not involve him having a

thought about an object. A subject understanding the sentence 'Dthat [the shortest spy] is a spy' does not have a singular thought about the person who is the shortest spy, but only has to understand the description. But what if 'dthat' is interpreted as Kaplan originally intended – as a directly referential singular term? Does that mean that a subject accepting such sentences has a singular thought?

It does not. The description ' $\alpha$ ' in 'dthat[ $\alpha$ ]' is not part of the *content* of the thought. It is the content which is held constant across counterfactual situations. The description ' $\alpha$ ' is instead supposed to be the *character*, where character determines the content of the expression in every context (e.g. (1989a), p505). Kaplan accepts that the cognitive significance of a thought is its character rather than its content (see (1989a), p530). He also says:

When we say that a word is directly referential are we saying that its meaning *is* its reference (its only meaning is its reference, its meaning is nothing more than its reference)? Certainly not. [footnote: We see here a drawback to the terminology 'direct reference'. It suggests falsely that the reference is not mediated by a meaning, which it is. The meaning (character) is directly associated, by convention, with the word. The meaning determines the referent; and the referent determines the content....] Insofar as meaning is given by the rules of a language and is what is known by competent speakers, I would be more inclined to say in the case of directly referential words and phrases that their reference is *no* part of their meaning.....

Meanings tell us how the content of a word or phrase is determined by the context of use. Thus the meaning of a word or phrase is what I have called its *character*. ((1989a), p520-1)

Nevertheless, Kaplan thinks that by accepting a sentence containing a directly referential term, a subject can have a singular thought:

... a special form of knowledge of an object is neither required nor presupposed in order that a person may entertain as object of thought a singular proposition involving that object.

There is nothing inaccessible to the mind about the semantics of direct reference, even when the reference is to that which we know only by description. What allows us to take various propositional attitudes towards singular propositions is not the form of our acquaintance with the objects but is rather our ability to manipulate the conceptual apparatus of direct reference. ((1989a), p536)

I think that this is wrong. Kaplan is led to this conclusion because of his work on demonstratives and indexicals like 'I'. He thinks that such terms are directly

referential – their content is the object denoted, and the object remains constant across counterfactual situations. Their meaning is their character. A subject understanding ‘I’ needs to understand the rule that it refers to whoever is speaking or writing ((1989a), p520). A subject understanding a demonstrative needs to understand the accompanying demonstration, where a demonstration is:

...typically, though not invariably, a (visual) presentation of a local object discriminated by a pointing. ((1989a), p490)

In these cases Kaplan is right that a subject does have a singular thought – he is thinking about an object. But with demonstratives, the object is present to the subject. It must be in order for the subject to be able to demonstrate it. It is because of this that the subject can think about the object. With ‘I’, as I shall argue in Part III of this thesis, it is the fact that the object thought about is identical with the subject which enables him to think about it reflexively. Kaplan (1989a) thinks that the description in a dthat-term does the same work as a demonstration. But what is it that enables a subject to think about an object here? With a dthat-term the character is a description. But why should understanding a description enable a subject to think about an object? If ‘dthat[ $\alpha$ ]’ is supposed to function as a syntactically complete singular term, then its character does not enable the subject to think of the object, so the term has not been properly introduced.

Kaplan himself is less confident in this matter in his ‘Afterthoughts’. He says that he is “not entirely unsympathetic” with the following suggestion:

...that all names...however introduced, carry their referent as meaning; but not all names carry *knowledge of* their referent. Those names that were properly introduced, by ostension or based on some other form of knowledge of the referent, carry and transmit the requisite epistemic connection. But in a tiny fraction of cases the connection is absent – semantics (or metasemantics) does not require it – and in these cases we have direct reference, and expressibility, but no apprehension. ((1989b), p606)

It is knowing the object which is essential for a subject to have a singular thought about an independent object. Otherwise, how is his thought about that particular object?



### 3.3 Crimmins's 'Promiscuous' Notions

Neither descriptive names nor dthat-terms are counterexamples to the view that to think about an object the subject must be acquainted with the object. Either to understand sentences containing such terms the subject must have a descriptive thought, or the term in the sentence has not been properly introduced. If it is a descriptive thought only one object satisfies this description, but that does not make the thought a singular thought. Crimmins (1992) accepts a distinction between singular thought and descriptive thought, so why does he want to say that the thought that the shortest spy is a spy can be a singular thought about the shortest spy, even if the subject is not acquainted with the shortest spy? Crimmins thinks the objection to having a notion of an object in this case is that the notion is not useful. It cannot be tied up with other information about the object, or be used to direct an action towards the object. But this is not the point. The point is how a subject has a thought about an object in the first place. Without the object being somehow present in experience, there is nothing which makes the thought about that object. As McCulloch writes, criticizing such a view:

On this view, our capacity to refer gives us the prodigious ability to zap across space and time to the object in question (if there is one) and thereby come to stand to it in the relation described by (P) – and all by uttering a perfectly general sentence in the right frame of mind. What an incredible feat! (McCulloch (1985), p578)

A subject thinking a descriptive thought, even when it is an actualized description, is not having a singular thought. If the situation were different – if a different possible world were actual – a different object would be denoted by the description, but the subject would still have the same thought. This is not the case with singular thought. A subject is thinking about a particular object, and this object individuates the thought. If the situation were different, but the subject has the same thought, then he would be thinking of the same object. If he is thinking of a different object then it is a different thought.

descriptive thought, then the suggestion is that exportation is invalid, and the report cannot be existentially generalized. It cannot be concluded either:

$\exists x$  John believes  $x$  is a spy

or

John believes of the shortest spy that he is a spy.

If the report is instead being used to attribute a singular thought about the person who is the shortest spy then exportation and existential generalization are valid.

The idea to be considered in this chapter is that existential generalization and exportation are valid when the belief reported is about an object. But there is a further point too. This further idea is that our intuitions about when such beliefs are about an object are playing off our intuitions of when the subject is acquainted with the object. We think that John believes of the shortest spy that he is a spy when he is acquainted with the person who is the shortest spy – when he somehow knows this person. If he is not acquainted with the shortest spy then his belief is a general belief and a report of it cannot be existentially generalized or exported. Thus exportation and existential generalization are linguistic tests for acquaintance.

## 1 Kaplan's Proposal

The proposal that, in order for the exportation and existential generalization of a belief attribution to be valid the subject of the report must be acquainted with the object thought about, is made by Kaplan in 'Quantifying In' (1969). His article is written in response to Quine's 'Quantifiers and Propositional Attitudes' (1956), where Quine argues that while quantifying into modal contexts makes no sense, quantifying into propositional attitudes does. That is, Quine argues that while it is invalid to infer  $\exists x \Box Fx$  from  $\Box Fa$ , it makes epistemological sense to conclude that  $\exists x(J \text{ believes } Fx)$  from  $(J \text{ believes } Fa)$ . For example, Quine thinks that from:

Necessarily 9 is greater than 5,

it is illegitimate to conclude that:

$\exists x$  Necessarily  $x$  is greater than 5.

However, from:

John believes Mary is tired,

it can be concluded:

$\exists x$  John believes  $x$  is tired.

The reason that Quine thinks that we must be able to quantify into epistemological contexts is because a sentence such as:

Ralph believes that someone is a spy,  
can be analysed in two ways. Under one reading, Ralph just believes that there are spies. Under another reading, Ralph believes that a particular person is a spy. Quine proposes that to make sense of this second reading we have to quantify into a belief context:

$\exists x$  Ralph believes that  $x$  is a spy.

What we have here is the explicitly linguistic suggestion from Quine that if a belief is about an object then its report can be analysed by quantifying into a belief context.

Things are not quite so straightforward for Quine, though, as although he thinks that in order to capture reports of beliefs about objects one *must* quantify into belief contexts, he does not think that so quantifying makes *logical* sense.<sup>1</sup> This is because Quine takes belief contexts (like quotation contexts) to be opaque, where the names or singular terms within the context are not purely referential. He thinks that in opaque contexts, neither substitution, nor existential generalization is valid. Quine thus proposes that there are really two different senses of the word 'belief' – a relational sense, which admits both substitution and existential generalization, and a notional sense, which admits neither. Notional belief is a two place relation between a subject and (Quine thinks) a sentence. The belief report expressed by 'John believes that Mary is tired' relates John to the sentence 'Mary is tired'. Mary might also be called 'Jane' by some people, but John might be unaware of this. As the sentence 'Mary is tired' is opaque, it does not follow that John believes that Jane is tired: John is not related to the sentence 'Jane is tired' and 'Jane' cannot be substituted for 'Mary' in the opaque sentence 'Mary is tired'. It is also illegitimate to existentially generalize. However, in its relational sense, belief is a three place relation between a subject, an object, and (for Quine) a sentence containing a variable. If 'John believes that Mary is tired' is to be understood in its relational sense, it can also be written as 'John believes of Mary that she is tired'. It relates John to the

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<sup>1</sup> This is discussed in detail in Kaplan (1986), Fine (1989) and Stanley (1997)

object Mary, however this object may be named, and says of her that she is tired. Existential generalization is valid, as is substitution. In a relational belief report it is not specified what belief the subject holds – i.e. on Quine's view it is not specified what sentence the subject accepts or how the object thought about is denoted. The report just states that the subject has a belief about an object, and so the sentence the subject accepts meets a certain condition – it contains a name which refers to an object.

But it does not seem necessary to say that there are two different senses of 'believe' in belief reports. In 'Opacity' (1986) Kaplan argues that Quine is wrong to assume that because substitution fails in belief contexts, existential generalization must also fail. He agrees that there are two readings, of (e.g.) a report such as:

Ralph believes that someone is a spy,

These are:

(1)  $\exists x$  (Ralph believes that  $x$  is a spy), and

(2) Ralph believes that  $\exists x$  ( $x$  is a spy).

Kaplan argues that once we have analysed the report in two different ways:

...what remains to do in order to 'disambiguate' the lexical item ['believe'] is completely determined: [(1)] requires the relational sense, [(2)] takes the notional sense... Yet it was the language of [(1)] and [(2)] that was regarded as 'dubious' and as demanding reformulation. In this case, if 'disambiguation' suffices, re-ambiguation does so likewise. If we can provide meaning preserving rules which transform each logically dubious formulation into a *unique* indubitable one, then the very existence of those rules shows that the original doubts were unfounded. ((1986), p237)

Take the belief report 'John believes that Mary is tired'. If Kaplan is right, against Quine, then although we cannot substitute and obtain 'John believes that Jane is tired' even if 'Jane' and 'Mary' refer to the same object, it still makes sense to existentially generalize and conclude that  $\exists x$  John believes  $x$  is tired, and exportation is justified, so John believes of Mary that she is tired can also be concluded. We do not need two different senses of belief. In the same way, a subject may believe that Hesperus is a planet, and believe that Phosphorus is not a planet. We cannot substitute 'Hesperus' for 'Phosphorus' in reports of these beliefs, as that would not accurately report what the subject believes. Nevertheless, it seems correct to say that the subject believes of Hesperus that it

is a planet, and that he believes of Phosphorus that it is not a planet. And this is because his belief is about an object in each case.

What are the conditions, if any, on a subject's belief which make the existential generalization and exportation of a report of his belief valid? Kaplan (1969) follows Quine in thinking that it is justified to export or existentially generalize belief reports when the belief reported is about an object. But he goes further than Quine and proposes that for this to be the case there must be an acquaintance relation between subject and object. Kaplan tries to give an analysis of Quine's relational belief – a relation between a subject and an object and an open sentence. He does so by seeing what conditions there must be on the name of the object in the sentence accepted, for exportation and generalization to be valid. However, Kaplan thinks that Quine's conditions are too weak, and allow for (e.g.) exportation in cases where intuitively we would think there is no belief about an object. Quine and Kaplan agree that there are two readings of (e.g.):

Ralph believes that someone is a spy.

As discussed before, these are:

- (1)  $\exists x$  (Ralph believes that  $x$  is a spy), and
- (2) Ralph believes that  $\exists x$  ( $x$  is a spy).

The first attributes a belief about an object, while the second attributes only the general belief that there are spies. But even if Ralph has only the second general belief, he can also have the belief that one of the spies will be the shortest of all the spies, and will thus believe that the shortest spy is a spy. And if Ralph believes that the shortest spy is a spy, then there is nothing in what Quine writes to prevent the conclusion that  $\exists x$  (Ralph believes that  $x$  is a spy).<sup>2</sup> Yet the general intuition is that in this case such a belief is not about an object – it is still a general belief – and so existential generalization should not be valid.

In (1969), in marked contrast to his later work, Kaplan states that:

...I am unwilling to adopt any theory of proper names which permits me to perform a dubbing in absentia, as by solemnly declaring "I hereby dub the first child to be born in the twenty-second century 'Newman 1'", and thus grant myself standing to have beliefs about that as yet unborn child. ((1969), p229)

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<sup>2</sup> Kaplan takes it that definite descriptions can be referential

At this stage Kaplan does not think that a subject can have a belief about Newman 1, and does not think that belief attributions about Newman 1 can be existentially generalized. Instead, to be able to have thoughts or beliefs about an object the thinker must be *en rapport* with that object; if the thinker has a thought expressed by a sentence '*a* is *F*', then he must be *en rapport* with *a*. Kaplan explains this by saying that the name '*a*' must be *of a*, and must be a *vivid* name for *a*. He originally explains what he means for a name to be *of* an object by discussing the relation of a picture to its subject. For a picture (or a name) to be *of* an object, then the object "must serve significantly in the causal chain leading to the picture's production and also serve as object for the picture" (1969, p226) Just because a picture resembles an object does not mean that it is *of* that object. I might own two identical cups and take a picture of just one of them, cup 1. Even though my picture also looks like cup 2, it is not *of* cup 2 as cup 2 was not causally linked to the picture. In the same way a name must be *of* its subject; the name must be causally linked to the object it names. There is also the requirement that the name must be a vivid name of the object for the thinker:

The notion of a vivid name is intended to go to the purely internal aspects of individuation. Consider typical cases in which we would be likely to say that Ralph knows *x* or is acquainted with *x*. Then look only at the conglomeration of images, names and partial descriptions which Ralph employs to bring *x* before his mind. Such a conglomeration, when suitably arranged and regimented, is what I call a vivid name... .... If the name is such, that on the assumption that there exists some individual *x* whom it both denotes and resembles we should say that Ralph knows *x* or is acquainted with *x*, then the name is vivid. ((1969), p229)

For Kaplan, the knowledge or acquaintance the thinker must have of the object is not further defined but is basic, and it is taken for granted that there are obvious cases when a subject is acquainted with an object. Kaplan does give examples of when a name might be vivid, but he does not take any to be definitional. He thinks that the subject's knowledge of the object does not entail that the subject can recognize the object under all circumstances, as there are clear counterexamples to this (for example, the subject may not realize that Hesperus is Phosphorus). He also does not think that the subject must always have perceived the object, or be able to locate the object (p230).

Kaplan (1969) thinks that just having condition i), the causal condition that the name is *of* an object, is not enough to permit existential generalization or exportation. This is because of various counterexamples such as the case of Sherlock Holmes viewing a murder victim. Simply by viewing the body, the term 'the murderer' would be a name of the murderer for Holmes. Kaplan believes that definite descriptions are referring terms, so the sentence 'The murderer murdered the victim' refers to the murderer. However, if this is all he knows, the subject's thought is not *about* the person who murdered the victim – just because the report 'Holmes believes the murderer murdered the victim' is true, we do not want to conclude that  $\exists x$  (Holmes believes  $x$  murdered the victim). We only want to conclude Holmes believes  $\exists x$  ( $x$  murdered the victim). For existential generalization and exportation to be valid Kaplan thinks we also need condition ii), that the name of the object is a vivid name for the subject. Holmes needs to be appropriately related to the individual in question before we are prepared to say that there is someone whom Holmes believes to be the murderer.

Kaplan's (1969) proposal is that there is a linguistic test – that of exportation and existential generalization – for when a belief report attributes a singular thought about an object to a subject. And the thought is that it is not enough for the singular term in the belief report simply to name an object – a subject accepting a sentence containing a referring term still may not have a thought about an object. Instead, the subject must be *en rapport* with the object. So consider the case of the descriptive name:

(D) Let us use 'Julius' to refer to whoever invented the zip (Evans (1979), p181)

And consider the report:

John believes Julius invented the zip

John believes this only from understanding the descriptive name 'Julius'. John believes that Julius invented the zip because he knows that 'Julius' has been stipulated to refer to the inventor of the zip. It does not seem correct to conclude:

John believes of Julius that he invented the zip.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Evans does not believe that descriptive names can be exported, but still thinks they are referring terms. At one point Kaplan (1989a) does think that dthat-terms can be exported – but he is much more wary of this in (1989b)

The proposal is that John's belief is not about an object, and this is why exportation is invalid. And the reason why we think that the belief is not about an object is that John is not acquainted with the person Julius – he only understands the description by which the name was defined.

## 2 Holton's Objection

Holton (1994) gives an argument which, if correct, shows that the above cannot be right. He argues that *if* the test for whether a belief or thought is about an object is whether its attribution can be existentially generalized, this *cannot* fit together with a *know which* account of when a belief is about an object. If his argument is correct it can be extended to show that there cannot be a fit between existential generalization and *any* condition on the relation between subject and object. This means that the proposed linguistic test for whether a subject's belief is about an object cannot fit together with the condition that a subject must be acquainted with an object in order to think about it.

Holton ((1994), p123) considers the sentence:

(1) Hilary believes that she will sail a sloop<sup>4</sup>

There are two readings of this. On one reading it is about a particular object, a particular sloop. On another, it is just a general belief and is not about any one sloop. Holton considers the hypothesis that the difference between the reading which is about an object, and that which is not is that, when the belief ascribed is about an object, the subject *knows which* object it is about – Hilary can answer the question 'Which thing will you sail?'. His proposal is that this does not fit with analysing the two readings of the sentence in the following ways:

(2) [An  $x$ :  $x$  is a sloop] Hilary believes that she will sail  $x$

(3) Hilary believes that [an  $x$ :  $x$  is a sloop] she will sail  $x$

(2) is supposed to be about a particular sloop, while (3) is supposed to be ascribing a general belief. Holton argues that the *know which* criterion is not what makes a reading of (1) about an object.

Holton's argument is in given terms of embedded belief reports. He looks at the example:

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<sup>4</sup> My numbering



- (4) Hoover charged that the Berrigans believed that their accomplices would kidnap a high American official

Analysed in terms of scope distinctions (which Holton calls a Russellian analysis) we get three analyses (e.g. see p125):

- (5) [An x: high official x] Hoover charged that the Berrigans believed that their accomplices would kidnap x
- (6) Hoover charged that [An x: high official x] the Berrigans believed that their accomplices would kidnap x
- (7) Hoover charged that the Berrigans believed that [An x: high official x] their accomplices would kidnap x

In (5) there is a particular official that both Hoover's charge and the Berrigans's belief are about. In (6) Hoover's charge is not about a particular official, but the Berrigan's belief is. In (7) neither Hoover's charge nor the Berrigan's belief is about a particular object. Holton argues that if what is required for a belief to be about an object is that the subject knows who the object is, then there should be a fourth reading – where Hoover knows who the official is, but the Berrigans do not. The Berrigans might have been told of the plan, but not of the identity of the official, while Hoover knows who it is (p126). On a Russellian analysis, there is no way that Hoover's charge can fall within the scope of the indefinite description while the Berrigans's belief falls without it. Thus a Russellian analysis in terms of scope distinctions does not fit with the *know which* criterion.

As Holton discusses ((1994), p128), this is not just a problem for accounts which specify that the condition necessary for a thought to be about an object is that the subject *knows which* object it is. It seems to be a problem for any account where there is a condition on what it is for a thought to be about an object, whether this condition is a causal condition, an acquaintance condition, or something else.<sup>5</sup> Suppose that there is a condition which my thought *a is F* must meet in order for it to be about an object. Either this condition is met, or it is not.<sup>6</sup> If we have an embedded belief ascription 'A believes that B believes that P' then either A's belief is about an object, or it is not, and either B's belief is about an object or it is not. So we have 4 options. Belief reports of the form 'A believes that B believes C believes that P' will be ambiguous in 8 ways. Analysing these embedded belief reports by using Russellian scope distinctions cannot give us the

<sup>5</sup> Pickles (1995) also argues something like this in his response to Holton

<sup>6</sup> Someone like Millikan would not hold this, of course. For her, it would be a matter of degree.

same number of options. With a single belief operator we get two readings. With an embedded belief we get three readings. With beliefs of the form 'A believes that B believes C believes that P' we get four readings. Someone higher up in the iterations cannot fall within the scope of the indefinite description if those at a lower level do not. So, if Holton is right, being acquainted with an object cannot be a condition on having a thought about an object if a subject's having a thought about an object can be tested for by existential generalization.

In fact, although Holton does not see it like this, his example is not so much a problem for a *know which* or acquaintance restriction on singular thought, but is instead an argument against the proposal that singular thought can be marked at the level of an attribution of the thought. Again, if we have the embedded belief report 'A believes that B believes that P' then either A's belief is about an object or it is not, and B's belief is about an object, or it is not. And it is these four possibilities which cannot be captured by the scope-distinction analysis. The focus on the *know which* condition is a little misleading. Holton disagrees with this analysis, saying that in the fourth case, the Berrigans's belief is about a particular individual, without their knowing who it is about (p126). However, he does not think this is a particular or singular belief because of the failure of the *know which* condition. So it seems that even though Holton thinks the belief is about something, he still thinks it is a general belief.

In any case, Holton's argument does not work. In the fourth option, supposedly not captured by the Russellian analysis, Hoover is supposed to know who the official is, while the Berrigans do not. Or, to put it not in terms of *knowing who*, Hoover is supposed to have a particular belief, while the Berrigans do not. But surely it could be the case that Hoover has a *separate* belief about who the official is. Or that Hoover has a separate belief about a particular official. And his charge about the Berrigans is not about a particular individual (and nor is their belief). In more formal terms, there seems no reason why the fourth option could not be analysed as:

- (8) (Hoover charged that the Berrigans believed that [an x: high official x] their accomplices would kidnap x) and ([an x: high official x] Hoover charged that x would be kidnapped by the Berrigans officials).

Hoover's charge (or belief) is about the Berrigans's belief – and their belief is either about an object or is a general belief. Despite what Holton says, I think that in the fourth option their belief is a general belief. If Hoover also has a belief about an object here, then this seems clearly to be a case of a separate belief, over and above his belief about the Berrigans's belief. To take another example, suppose:

Mary believes Ralph believes that someone is a spy

The claim is that there is a case which cannot be captured by scope distinctions, which is where Ralph has a general belief, but Mary has a singular belief about an object. But surely in the second-level ascription above, Mary's reported belief is about Ralph's belief, and whether that is a singular or general belief. In Holton's supposed fourth case, Ralph's belief is a general belief, and Mary's belief is about that. She may even be mistaken that Ralph's belief is a general belief – perhaps he is, after all, acquainted with a particular spy. But this does not matter. Mary believes that Ralph has a general belief, and this is what her belief is about. If Mary happens to have a singular belief about a specific person who is a spy, then this is separate from her belief about Ralph's belief.

Pickles (1995) says of these suggestions that "This claim contradicts the view that there is a semantic ambiguity in belief ascription due to the distinction between general and particular beliefs. So if we stick with this Russellian account of the situation, this latter view has to go" (p77). But I am not sure why this must be the case. Holton's argument is that there are more things in the world – more ways of different subjects thinking about objects or having general beliefs – than we would predict on the basis of our use of language, if this is to be explained by scope distinctions. But this does not seem to be such a problem. Why should we think that all the various possibilities should be capturable in terms of scope distinctions? The suggestion of this chapter is that belief ascriptions are ambiguous, and that in some cases they can be existentially generalized and exported, and in other cases they cannot. In the cases where they can be exported the proposal is that the belief is about an object, and our intuitions about whether or not this is the case play off our intuitions of whether the subject is acquainted with the object thought about. There could be a semantic ambiguity in belief ascription due to the distinction between general

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and particular belief at the first level – but there is no reason this must commit us to holding that there must be a semantic ambiguity in further iterations. There is no reason to think that such scope distinctions must be able to capture whether a ‘higher level’ subject, who has a belief about another’s belief, also has a particular belief about the object. The only reason we might reach this conclusion seems to be if we think that the distinction in thought between having a thought about an object and having a general belief is only a shadow of a linguistic distinction. The proposal is that to have a thought about an object the subject must be acquainted with the object, and there is a linguistic test for this in that when a subject’s thought is about an object, the attribution of the thought can be existentially generalised. There is no reason why the distinction between singular thought and general thought should be marked in more complex attributions.

### 3 What is the Linguistic Test Marking?

Holton takes himself to be arguing against the *know which* criterion fitting with a Russellian analysis of belief reports in terms of scope distinctions. But actually, his argument, if it worked, would show that there cannot be a linguistic test for when a belief is about an object. However, it does not show this – the distinction between singular and descriptive thought is not marked in some iterated attributions, but there is no reason why this distinction could not be marked linguistically at the level of an attribution of the thought.

But even if there is a linguistic test for whether a subject has a singular thought, does the validity of existential generalization and exportation really depend on whether the subject having the thought attributed is *en rapport* with, or acquainted with, the object thought about? Perhaps what is really driving the cases where existential generalization is permissible is only that the subject’s thought is about an object. And this is not driven by a subject’s acquaintance with the object.

Such a position is in line with those like Soames ((1995) and elsewhere). He argues that it is in the nature of singular terms that they can come out of belief contexts. Acquaintance, according to him, has nothing to do with it. Soames

believes that names and other singular terms refer directly to objects; the meaning of a singular term is only the object referred to. The object referred to is determined solely by the causal chains that link the referent to the term. A subject can refer directly to an object using a singular term, and if the subject accepts a proposition containing a singular term he automatically has a thought about the object. There is no condition that an ascription of a thought about an object can impose which is not already present in the acceptance of a singular proposition. Soames writes:

...to believe a proposition, it is sufficient for one to understand and accept any sentence or representation that expresses that proposition ((1995), p518)

And to accept a sentence one need not be acquainted with anything; in *Beyond Rigidity* ((2002), p72) Soames argues that all that is required to be a competent user of a name or expression 'n' is that:

- (i) the user has acquired a referential intention that (somehow) determines the object as the referent of n
- (ii) the speaker knows that assertively uttering 'n is F' involves saying of the referent of n that it 'is F'.

Because of this, with any attributions of thoughts, if there is a term referring to an object existential generalization and exportation are valid. Acquaintance is irrelevant.

Soames agrees with the intuitions that dthat-terms and descriptive names<sup>7</sup> cannot come out of belief contexts. So for instance, he thinks that it is incorrect to say that John believes of Julius that he invented the zip or that John believes of dthat [the first child born in the 21<sup>st</sup> century] that he is the first child born in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, he thinks that because of this, John does not believe that Julius invented the zip or that dthat [the first child born in the 21<sup>st</sup> century] is the first child born in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as if he did, then exportation would be valid. Soames argues along these lines in *Reference and Description* (2005), where he argues against the possibility of *a priori* knowledge of a contingent proposition. He argues that a subject accepting a sentence such as 'dthat [the shortest spy] is a spy' does not have contingent *a priori* knowledge, as if he did then we would be able to export a belief report containing the sentence, which we cannot. Soames concludes:

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<sup>7</sup> For further discussion see Chapter 4 of this thesis.

Regarding this scenario [the introduction of a descriptive name], one must say either (i) that the name hasn't successfully been introduced after all, (ii) that the speaker doesn't understand the name he has introduced, or (iii) that understanding and justifiably accepting a true sentence containing the name is not sufficient for knowing the proposition *p* which it expresses to be true. Either way, apriori knowledge of a contingent proposition has not been achieved. (Soames (2005), p55-6)

At this point there is not that much disagreement between Soames's and my positions. Neither of us thinks that by accepting the sentence 'Julius invented the zip' or 'dthat[the shortest spy] is a spy' a subject (John, say) has a singular thought. However, I am happy to say, at least in the case of descriptive names,<sup>8</sup> that we can say that John believes that Julius invented the zip, because in this case the subject has a descriptive thought. This is *a priori* because of the meaning of 'Julius'. But it is only *superficially* contingent<sup>9</sup>, because of its modal behaviour. It is not true in all possible worlds, because the description contains a rigidifier, which refers us back to the denotation in the actual world in each possible situation. But I agree with Soames that this does not mean that a subject can have *a priori* knowledge of a contingent singular proposition.

Where we disagree is over cases like proper names. Soames thinks that all that is required for a subject to have a singular thought is that he accept a sentence containing a proper name. And reports of such thoughts can be exported. I think that there is an additional constraint on having a singular thought; the subject must be acquainted with the object. He must know the object. It may well be that the cases where we think a subject has a singular thought coincide. I think that acquaintance can be transmitted through testimony, and so in understanding a sentence containing a proper name, the subject is acquainted with the object referred to, and so can think about it. But it is important to note that this additional acquaintance restraint is not necessary in deflationary accounts like Soames's.

Despite their intuitive plausibility, I do not think the linguistic tests of exportation and existential generalization cannot help us to decide whether

<sup>8</sup> In the case of dthat-terms, particularly if they are interpreted as syntactically complete directly referential terms, I am more inclined to say that the name has not been successfully introduced. See Chapter 4.

<sup>9</sup> See Evans (1979)

acquaintance is a condition on singular thought. I think that the most plausible explanation is that exportation is valid when a subject is thinking about an object, rather than having a general thought. The reason exportation seems to be a linguistic test for acquaintance is because in the case of non-first-personal thoughts about objects, it *is* a necessary condition that the subject is acquainted with the object in order to have a singular thought about an object. But this is because without being acquainted with an object, the subject is not in a position to think about it. His thought is not about one object rather than another. If a subject is not acquainted with an object then his thought is descriptive, even if only one object is denoted. The linguistic test does not give us any further reasons to think that a subject must be acquainted with an object in order to refer to it.

## Chapter 6

### Acquaintance and Possible Worlds

Acquaintance is important. Being acquainted with an object puts a subject in a position to think about that object. It is what makes a subject's thought about one object rather than another. Acquaintance restricts the thoughts a subject is able to have – he cannot have a singular thought about an object if he is not acquainted with it. And if the object is different, the thought is different – a subject's thought about that apple on the left is different from his thought about that apple on the right.

That acquaintance is important has consequences for how the content of a subject's thought can be represented. The purpose of this chapter is to argue that if a subject's acquaintance with an object is necessary for him to think about and refer to the object, then his thought content cannot be represented by sets of metaphysically possible worlds.

The discussion in this chapter is based on a version of Jackson's Knowledge Argument, given by Stalnaker in 'On Thomas Nagel's Objective Self' (2003a). As usual, Jackson's Mary is in her black and white room and knows everything there is to know about colour but has never seen colours. In this example she is told that she is going to come out of her room and be shown either a red or a green apple. So before this experiment takes place, she knows that the possibilities still open to her are that she will be in front of a red apple, or she will be in front of a green apple. She comes out of her room and sees an apple – the red one. But although she now knows what it is like to see a colour – what red is like – she still does not know what colour it is – she does not know whether it is red or whether it is green. What has changed? If a possible worlds account of content is correct, it must be able account for what goes on in this example. But I will argue that it cannot. The reason it cannot is that acquaintance is doing some work here. When Mary is acquainted with the apple the possibilities are reset, and the possible worlds account of thought content cannot accommodate this.



I begin with a brief overview of a possible worlds account of thought content, including how it must be adapted to allow a subject to have an informative belief in the necessary proposition. I will also discuss Stalnaker's (2003a) proposal of how a possible worlds account can accommodate subjective, or self-locating, beliefs. This differs from his account in 'Indexical Belief' (1981). I then turn to Stalnaker's example. My aim is to show the effect that acquaintance has on Mary's belief, and why this leads to the conclusion that a possible worlds account of thought content is insufficient.

## 1 A Possible Worlds Account of Thought Content

On a possible worlds account of thought content, there are many possible worlds compatible with a subject's thoughts. When he comes to have a new belief, possible worlds no longer compatible are eliminated. A belief is informative and a subject comes to have objective knowledge if some possible worlds are ruled out. Possible worlds – different possibilities – are what assertions and other states with content distinguish between. As Frank Jackson puts it:

... to represent is to make a division into what accords with, and what does not accord with, how things are being represented as being. ((2001), p617)

And Stalnaker says:

...the content of speech acts and intentional mental states should be identified with their truth-conditions, represented by a set of possible situations. ((1999), p26)

If I say 'Mary is sitting down', for example, then the content of my assertion is the set of all and only the possible worlds in which Mary is sitting down.

I will assume a version of two-dimensional semantics to allow this notion of thought content to account for the fact that a subject can come to have an informative belief in the necessary proposition.<sup>1</sup> Without two-dimensional semantics, as both 'Hesperus' and 'Phosphorus' refer to the same object in the actual world, they refer to the same object in all possible worlds. The belief that Hesperus is Phosphorus is true in all possible worlds, and no worlds are ruled out. Thus the belief cannot be informative. With two-dimensional semantics, when a subject comes to learn that Hesperus is Phosphorus the content of his

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 2, Section 3.1, for discussion.

belief is the diagonal proposition which is not necessary.<sup>2</sup> The content of a subject's belief is characterized by giving a one-dimensional proposition, a set of possible worlds. Normally this will just be the standard (one-dimensional) horizontal proposition expressed. But sometimes this does not give the right result, and in such cases the content is the diagonal proposition.<sup>3</sup>

As was discussed in Chapter 2, Stalnaker comes to the conclusion that even allowing that the content of an assertion or thought is sometimes the diagonal proposition, a possible worlds account of content still has problems explaining indexical thoughts. As Stalnaker limits epistemic possibility to metaphysical possibility he does not allow possible worlds containing an objective *I* to characterize a subject's belief content. Thus he thinks that a subject's thought expressed by 'I am *F*' cannot be represented by a set of metaphysically possible worlds. For instance, suppose the amnesiac Lingens comes to believe what he would express by 'I am Lingens'. What belief is he expressing? What possibilities is he ruling out? He already knows that Lingens is the cousin of a spy, and so Lingens is in all the possible worlds compatible with his background beliefs. But what happens when he learns what he would express by 'I am Lingens'? Perhaps, because he knows he is wearing a red shirt (what he would express by 'I am wearing a red shirt') he now knows that Lingens is wearing a red shirt, so he can rule out all of those worlds in which Lingens is not wearing a red shirt. Similarly for any other property *F* that he knows he possesses. He now knows Lingens possesses this property, and can rule out those worlds in which Lingens does not possess this property. But this ruling out of worlds does not represent the information he expresses when he says 'I am Lingens'.

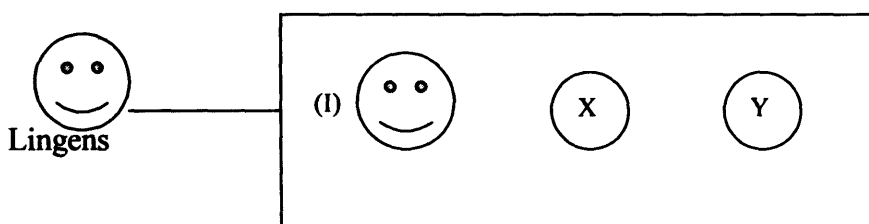
Stalnaker's idea, after his rejection of his 'Indexical Belief' (1981) account, is that subjective or indexical content is like ordinary content in that it is to be understood in terms of the way it distinguishes between possible worlds. But these must be *labelled* or *indexed* possible worlds. With subjective information,

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<sup>2</sup> In fact, if acquaintance restricts the thoughts a subject is able to have, and the object is essential to the thought, then on many understandings of two-dimensional semantics, the diagonal proposition will also be necessary in this case. I will ignore this point here, although it is obviously another reason for thinking that a possible world's account of thought content cannot be correct.

<sup>3</sup> For further discussion and explanation of this, see Chapter 2.

the identity of the information is essentially tied to the context of speech or thought in which the possibilities are being distinguished among (e.g. (2003a), p256). When we specify the set of possible worlds we must also include information about the subject who expresses or thinks a thought with that content. So suppose again Lingens says 'I am Lingens'. Then the content of this assertion is represented by the set of possible worlds containing Lingens, but which are indexed to the subject as Lingens and the present time. When Lingens says 'I am Lingens' he labels himself as the subject.



The box represents Lingens's thought content (just one possible world here is being used as representative of many). The possible world contains Lingens, X and Y. It is indexed to Lingens, and he labels himself as subject using an 'I'-label.

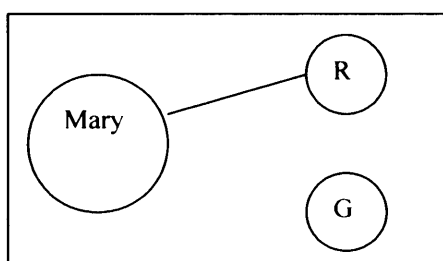
Stalnaker's later account is similar to Lewis's in 'Attitudes *De Dicto* and *De Se*' (1979). Recall Lewis proposes that the content of a belief is a property rather than a proposition. As Lewis says (p147) this is the same as saying that the content of a belief is a set of centred possible worlds, rather than a set of uncentred possible worlds. A centred possible world is a possible world with a designated object and time at the centre. If a subject believes what he would assert by 'I am *F*' the content of this belief is the set of centred worlds in which the designated centre is *F*. The difference between Stalnaker's labelled worlds and Lewis's centred worlds is that, with labelled worlds, the designated centre is indexed to a particular individual and time – the individual who is in that belief state at that time. So if Lingens believes 'I am *F*', on Lewis's view, his belief has the content of the set of centred worlds in which the designated centre is *F*. On Stalnaker's account, the belief's content is the set of labelled worlds in which Lingens is designated to be the centre and is *F*. On Stalnaker's new account, like the Fregean's, the thought content of two different subjects thinking 'I am *F*' will

be different, as a different object will be labelled as subject in each case. So in this, it differs from Lewis's proposal.

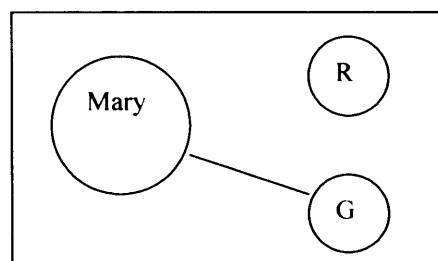
Lewis's 'two gods' example ((1979), p139) can be explained using labelled worlds. Recall that Stalnaker's earlier explanation in 'Indexical Belief' could not account for this.<sup>4</sup> When the god (X, say) on the tallest mountain learns that he is on the tallest mountain he is not ruling out objective (uncentred) possible worlds. He is not ruling out a world where god X is on the coldest mountain and another god is on the tallest mountain – the reverse of what the actual situation happens to be. This would only represent the information that X is on the tallest mountain. It does not represent the information X expresses by 'I am on the tallest mountain'. On a labelled worlds view, what god X is doing is labelling himself as subject as the god on the tallest mountain. He is ruling out labelled worlds where the god on the coldest mountain is labelled as subject. 'I am the god on the tallest mountain' is subjective information – labelled possible worlds are being ruled out.

## 2 Stalnaker's Example

Let us now consider Stalnaker's example of Mary emerging from her black and white room. Stalnaker thinks we can use his possible worlds account of indexical thought to explain what it is that Mary 'knows' when she comes out of her room. Before she comes out of the room, she knows that she will either be in front of a red or a green apple. The possibilities open to her can be represented as follows, where the line between Mary and the apple represents that she is in front of it.



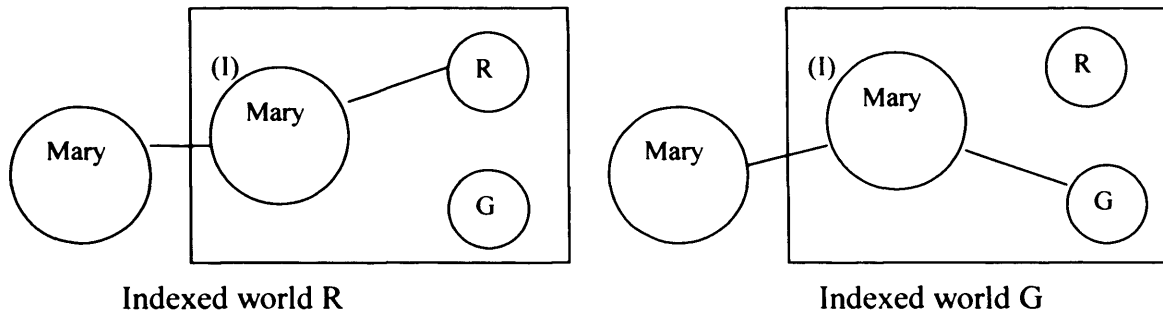
World R



World G

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 2, Section 3.2, for discussion.

When she comes out, she still does not know which world she is in as she does not know whether she is in front of a red or green apple. What has changed? According to Stalnaker, it is just her position in the world. She is now able to represent that the experience is like *this* – the worlds can be indexed or labelled.



Stalnaker's point is that when she comes out of her black and white room Mary does not gain any objective knowledge – she is not ruling out any possible worlds. Instead, she is now in a position to represent an objective fact from a subjective point of view. The possibilities still open are R and G, but these are now indexed to Mary herself.

It is important to note that Mary is not gaining subjective knowledge either – she is not ruling out any labelled possible worlds. She is just now in a position to represent subjective information about this experience. There is such a thing as subjective information, which is gained by ruling out labelled possible worlds. Lewis's 'two gods' scenario is such a case. But the Mary case is not like this. No worlds are ruled out – Mary can now just represent the possible worlds differently.

Stalnaker's example is supposed to convince us that Mary's ignorance before she comes out of the room is the same as her ignorance after she comes out – the possibilities still open to her are the same as in both cases she does not know whether she is in front of the red or the green apple. Coming out of the room has not changed this. He wants us to agree that when Mary comes out of her black and white room and sees colour for the first time she is not gaining any knowledge – either subjective or objective. His possible worlds account entails that she learns nothing because no worlds are ruled out. But is it right that she learns nothing? If it is not, his account of subjective content must be wrong. I

will argue that we can show that Mary does indeed gain information – but also that this information cannot be represented by ruling out possible worlds.

### **3 The Problem**

Stalnaker thinks his example shows that there is no need to postulate subjective facts – phenomenal information – to explain what Mary knows when she comes out of her black and white room. This is a controversial area, as those who think that there are subjective facts in this case often assume both that a subject is acquainted with these facts, and that he cannot be wrong about them. But I think that we can show that Mary does learn something – gain information – when she comes out of her room, without worrying about subjective facts. What makes her learn something new is that she is now acquainted with an object and so is able to have a new thought about it – a thought which she could not have before. The issue turns on acquaintance, not on subjective facts. Exactly the same problems will arise for Stalnaker if a subject's acquaintance with an external object restricts what he can think about. So let us consider a modified example where Mary has singular thoughts about external objects.

Suppose Mary knows absolutely everything there is to know about two stars – Betelgeuse and Rigel – but she has never seen them. No one has ever seen them, so everything she learns about them is in descriptive terms. She is told that she will come out of her room and see one of the stars, but is not told which one it will be. After she comes out of her room she sees one of the stars – and is now in a position to represent subjective information about this experience. But she still does not know which star she is in front of. So, if Stalnaker's view just discussed is correct, her ignorance can be modelled in similar ways both before and after she comes out of her room. If Stalnaker is right, Mary does not learn anything new when she comes out of the room – neither possible worlds, nor labelled possible worlds are ruled out. When she was in the room, the possibilities open to her were that Mary was in front of Betelgeuse or that Mary was in front of Rigel. When she comes out, the same possibilities are open, only they are now indexed to Mary herself. When she comes out of her room she is in a position to represent subjective information about the experience. She can now

think ‘Is this Betelgeuse or is this Rigel?’ and she could not think it in this way before.

But it is the representation of subjective information once she comes out that is the main problem. What is the subjective information that Mary can represent once she comes out of her room? If acquaintance restricts what a subject can think about, then the thoughts that Mary can think will depend on which star she is actually in front of. Stalnaker and I agree that a subject cannot think ‘Is this Betelgeuse or is this Rigel?’ before she is actually in front of a star. But Stalnaker thinks that once she is in front of a star she can now think this – and it does not matter which star she is in front of. He thinks of ‘this’ as a variable label. Whereas, if acquaintance is important, the thoughts a subject is able to have will depend on which star she is in front of – on which world is actual. If Mary sees Betelgeuse then she can wonder: Is this<sub>B</sub> Betelgeuse or is this<sub>B</sub> Rigel? If she sees Rigel then she wonders: Is this<sub>R</sub> Betelgeuse or is this<sub>R</sub> Rigel?

Because the possibilities open differ depending on whether she is actually in front of Betelgeuse or Rigel, then Mary must have learned something when she comes out of her room. If what Mary wonders differs depending on whether she is in the Betelgeuse world or the Rigel world, then that information must also be different from the information she had whilst still in her room, and before she was acquainted with the stars. Recall that Stalnaker, unlike Jackson, thinks that when Mary comes out of her room she does not learn anything – there is no new information. But there must be new information if what Mary wonders differs depending on what world she is in.

) ?

To bring out this point, consider the case of Mary and her friend Alice, both in the room, never having seen either Betelgeuse or Rigel. They know everything about the stars in descriptive terms, but are not acquainted with them. They are told that when they come out of the room, one of them will be in front of Betelgeuse and the other in front of Rigel. In fact, Mary is in front of Betelgeuse and Alice is in front of Rigel. Before, when they were in the room, they were in the same information state. When they come out of the room they are not. So each of them must have learned something, and this is because they are now

acquainted with an object and can have a singular thought about it. And since they do learn something, Stalnaker's account of subjective information, which has the consequence that there is no information update, must be wrong.

Acquaintance resets what possibilities there are - it affects the powers of representation and does not only limit the range of possibilities. And it is this which is incompatible with a possible worlds account of thought content.

*for content -*



## **Part III**

# **First-Person Reference without Acquaintance**

## Chapter 7

### The Token-Reflexive Rule

To think about an independent object, a subject must be acquainted with the object. The object must be present to him in some way. Perhaps he perceives the object. Perhaps he hears about it, or reads about it. Perhaps he remembers it, from having once perceived it or heard about it. Such relations make the object present to the subject. By being acquainted with it in such ways, he is in a position to have a singular thought about that particular object.

What about in his own case, when he thinks first-personally? What puts him in a position to be able to think about and refer to himself? My claim is that acquaintance is not needed because a subject is *already* in a position to think about himself. But what does this mean? This means that the subject is at the centre of his scheme of reference. By being acquainted with other objects he is able to 'reach out' and think of those objects. But he does not need any sort of acquaintance relation to be able to think of himself. He can think of himself reflexively.

To make sense of this claim, we need to consider subjective first-person thought. Subjective first-person thoughts are defined as those which have grounds which are from the first-person perspective. Their grounds have an 'internal' aspect; they are from the inside. There are specific ways of experiencing things, or knowing things from the first-person perspective. There is a first-personal way of experiencing the wind blowing my hair about, for instance, which grounds the subjective first-person thought 'The wind is blowing my hair'. Perry, in 'Myself and I' (1997) describes this first-personal way as follows:

This is a method for finding out whether someone has some property or does not, that we can each use to find out about ourselves, but can't use to find out about others. What one finds out may be accessible to others, using different methods. But the particular method in question can only be used by the person in question to find out about himself or herself. Feeling hunger is normally a way of detecting that one's own stomach is short of food. Feeling thirst is a way of knowing that one's throat is parched or that one's body is short of water. There is a certain feeling, that children are trained to recognize, that signals that one's bladder is full. In each case, someone else can determine the same thing, using a

different technique. This alternative technique may even be superior. Perhaps you can tell that I am blushing, by looking, when I am not sure. Perhaps you can be sure that my stomach is full, having noticed what I have put into it, when I am still in that charming interval between being full and feeling full. Parents are often better judges of the states of their children's bladder than the children themselves are. So the point isn't that our reflexive methods of knowing about ourselves are always infallible or superior to any other methods. It is that only we can use them. (Perry (1997/2000), p334)

There are specifically first-personal ways of experiencing things. There are specifically first-personal ways of remembering things, from the inside. There are first-personal ways of anticipating, hoping, wanting. This list is by no means exhaustive. These first-personal grounds, from the first-person perspective, are what ground the subject's subjective first-person thoughts. His subjective first-person thoughts are from this perspective. Only he, the subject, can have thoughts from this particular perspective; it is peculiar to him. When he thinks first-personally the subject ascribes these experiences to himself. He is not present in the experience; he, the subject, thinks of himself reflexively. First-person thoughts are about their own thinker, the subject.

If, like Perry (1997) and Crimmins (1994) one thinks of singular thought as involving notions, when a subject thinks first-personally, based on these first-personal grounds, he has a self-notion. Alternatively, one might like to think of this as an ability to think of oneself reflexively. In English, such thoughts are directly expressed by 'I' – a subject uses 'I' to refer to himself reflexively. Such thoughts are not descriptive thoughts; the subject does not think of himself as the subject of these experiences. He thinks of himself reflexively, and has a singular thought about himself, the subject of thought. Velleman (1996) puts it in the following way:

What makes a thought subjectively reflexive, after all, is that it is indexical in a special way: it has a peculiar way of pointing. A reflexive thought picks out a person at its center by mentally pointing to him in a distinctively inward-directed fashion.....Genuinely reflexive thoughts don't rely on an antecedent specification of their target: they just point to the subject, at the center of thought. They are – to put it somewhat paradoxically – unselfconscious about their reference, in that they require no other thought about whom they refer to. (Velleman (1996), p60)

mine?

It is unlikely to be denied that a subject has a first-person perspective on the world, and that it is this perspective which grounds many of his first-person thoughts. But it might be objected that it is precisely in having these grounds that a subject is acquainted with himself, and it is this which enables him to think first-personally. For instance, Evans (1982) argues that in some of these special first-personal ways which a subject has of learning about himself, he has information from himself.<sup>1</sup> It is this information from himself – his acquaintance with himself in experience – which grounds his first-person thoughts. It is because such thoughts are grounded in information from himself, he thinks, that they are immune to error through misidentification. It makes no sense to say, for example, 'Someone is sitting down, but is it I who is sitting down?' when this is known in a first-personal way:

...Immunity to error through misidentification is a straightforward consequence of demonstrative identification; it will exist whenever a subject's Idea of an object depends upon his ways of gaining knowledge of it. (Evans (1982), p218)

On this view, when a subject experiences (e.g.) sitting down from the inside he is acquainted with himself. He is present to himself as a physical object. He experiences himself sitting down, and it is this which puts him in a position to think about himself. Just as perceiving that apple, say, puts a subject in a position to think about that apple, so experiencing himself as a physical object puts him in a position to think about himself.

In the next chapter it will be argued that this view is mistaken. The subject thinks of himself first-personally because he is the subject of the thought. He does not need to be acquainted with himself in order to think of himself. To think that acquaintance must be involved is to misunderstand the nature of first-person thought, where the subject thinks reflexively. Acquaintance is only needed to enable him to think of objects independent of himself.

Before this, I want to consider a different worry. The concern is that there is something circular in this reflexive account of first-person reference. A subject

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<sup>1</sup> Evans does not think that the subject has information from himself in all cases of self-ascription. But he does think that bodily perception is a case where the subject has information from himself, and it is because he has this information that he can form an Idea of himself. He can then use this Idea to think about himself in other first-personal thoughts even when he is not receiving information from himself.

thinks first-personally by referring reflexively. He can intend to refer to himself. But what does it mean to say that he intends to refer to himself?

# 1      **Anscombe's Circularity Argument**

Anscombe (1975) frames the circularity worry in terms of the word 'I'. She considers the token-reflexive rule, which she explains as:

"I" is the word each one uses when he knowingly and intentionally refers to himself. (Anscombe (1975), p136)

When he uses the word 'I', a subject must be intending to refer to himself. But Anscombe thinks we cannot understand what is meant by 'himself' here. It cannot be the ordinary reflexive, she thinks, as a subject can intend to refer to himself without realizing it is himself. Perry's (1977) subject the amnesiac Lingens might well intend to refer to Lingens, and do so successfully, without realizing that he is referring to himself. 'Lingens' is also a term which Lingens can use to refer intentionally to himself. For the token-reflexive rule to explain how 'I' can refer first-personally, Anscombe thinks 'himself' must be a 'peculiar reflexive' (p136). Anscombe thinks this peculiar reflexive can only be explained in terms of 'I'. What Lingens does not realize is what he would express by 'I am Lingens.' As 'himself' can only be explained in terms of 'I', this makes the token-reflexive rule circular.

Because of her argument that the token-reflexive rule is circular, Anscombe then goes on to say:

If that is right, the explanation of the word 'I' as 'the word which each of us uses to speak of himself' is hardly an explanation! At least, it is no explanation if that reflexive has to be explained in terms of 'I'.....*We seem to need a sense to be specified for this quasi-name 'I'....we have not got this sense just by being told which object a man will be speaking of, whether he knows it or not, when he says 'I'....We have a right to ask what he knows; if 'I' expresses a way its object is reached by him, what Frege called an 'Art des Gegebenseins', we want to know what that way is and how it comes about that the only object reached in that way by anyone is identical with himself.* ((1975), p137, my emphasis).

Because she thinks the token-reflexive rule is circular, Anscombe goes off to search for how 'I' can 'latch on' to its object. How does the subject refer to himself? Because she concludes that what is normally required for reference is lacking in first-person thought, she concludes that 'I' does not refer.

Some have interpreted Anscombe's argument as showing that a 'deeper' level at which a subject can refer to himself in thought is needed. O'Brien (1994, 1995a) argues something along these lines. She argues that Anscombe's argument is based on the unobjectionable premise that a subject can refer to himself intentionally without referring to himself first-personally. The token-reflexive rule does not distinguish between these two cases and so cannot be what explains first-person reference. O'Brien thinks that Anscombe has made an error in assuming that what explains first-person thought should be present in the token-reflexive rule itself:

[Anscombe] seems to have thought that that element would be missing if it were absent from the specification of the rule and would be present only if it were included in the specification of the rule. We have come to see that the required element need not be part of the rule, but is rather something that a user of the rule can bring to bear when they use the rule. That required element is: the knowledge that a subject has that they themselves are using a term when they are. (O'Brien (1994), p280)

This interpretation of Anscombe is not surprising, as it is one that seems obvious when one considers how we understand the use of 'I' by other people. Suppose someone says 'I am sitting down'. Although in one way we understand the meaning of the words, we do not understand what is said unless we know who is using the term 'I'. We cannot have singular thought about the person, unless we are acquainted with the person who is saying 'I'. How do we know who is using 'I' in our own case?<sup>2</sup> I am using it. But what does this mean? If this is understood in terms of the token-reflexive rule there appears to be a regress. Perhaps I need to be acquainted with myself in order to know that I am using the term.

This is not Anscombe's argument, however. Anscombe thinks that the token-reflexive rule *can* distinguish between a subject's first-personal and his non-first-personal thought about himself. But it can only do this when 'himself' is the indirect reflexive. And she thinks the indirect reflexive can only be understood in terms of 'I'.

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<sup>2</sup> O'Brien (1995a) goes on to suggest that this deeper understanding involves knowledge of our own actions

Why exactly does Anscombe think the indirect reflexive can only be explained in terms of 'I'? And why, if the token-reflexive rule is circular, is her conclusion that a subject must have a conception associated with 'I', if it is to refer?<sup>3</sup> I think that the answers to these two questions are based on the same thing – that Anscombe assumes that in order to understand any referring expression we must grasp its sense. And she thinks that in order to grasp a term's sense, the subject must have a conception of the object referred to; he must know what kind of thing it is.

To see this, consider the first part of her argument. In this, she is arguing that the 'himself' in the rule "'I' is the word each one uses in speaking intentionally of himself" cannot be what we would think of as the ordinary reflexive pronoun.

She says:

Consider: 'Smith realizes (fails to realize) the identity of an object he calls 'Smith' with himself'. If the reflexive pronoun there is the ordinary one, then it specifies for us who frame or hear the sentence an object, whose identity with the object he calls 'Smith' Smith does or doesn't realize: namely the object designated by our subject word 'Smith'. (Anscombe (1975), p137)

This is one way of understanding the pronoun.<sup>4</sup> In understanding this third-person sentence we understand that the word 'himself' picks out the same referent as the subject term 'Smith'. We might well use this third-person sentence to report our hearing of a first-person utterance by Smith; perhaps 'I am (not) Smith'. In hearing the words 'I' or 'myself' said by Smith it is true that we, as listeners could pick out the speaker. Anscombe continues, trying to explain why treating 'himself' as the ordinary reflexive in this way should be a problem:

But that does not tell us what identity Smith himself realizes (or fails to realize). For, as Frege held, there is no path back from reference to sense; any object has many ways of being specified, and *in this case, through the peculiarity of the construction, we have succeeded in specifying an object (by means of the subject of our sentence) without specifying any conception under which Smith's mind is supposed to latch on to it.* For we don't want to say 'Smith does not realize the identity of Smith with Smith.' (Anscombe (1975), p137, my emphasis).

The problem seems to be that although we can understand the sentence in third-person terms, it gives us no indication of what, in first-person terms, it is that Smith *knows*. It does not explain how Smith manages to refer to himself. That is

<sup>3</sup> By a conception, Anscombe means that the subject knows what kind of thing the object is.

<sup>4</sup> See the discussion of Rumfitt in Section 2 below for another way of understanding the pronoun

why it must instead be the peculiar indirect reflexive. The indirect reflexive will explain how a subject's mind can 'latch on' to himself. But the assumption already underlying this is that if Smith thinks, in the first-person, 'I am (not) Smith' he must grasp the sense of the word 'I'. He must think of himself in the same way as he thinks of other objects. For Anscombe, this means having a conception of himself which enables him to pick out the object which he is. Then, to understand the sentence, he must also be able to pick out the object named 'Smith'. Perhaps he has read about Smith and so can have a singular thought about him. He must then either realize or not realize that this object Smith is the same as himself. Because the ordinary reflexive pronoun gives us no idea of what this conception could be, Anscombe concludes that the reflexive in this case must be a special sort of reflexive pronoun; one that can only be explained in terms of 'I'. Hence she concludes that the token-reflexive rule cannot explain anything.

To an extent Anscombe is right. 'I do not realize Smith is myself' means 'I do not realize I am Smith'. 'Myself' is explained in terms of 'I'. But this does not mean that the rule 'I use 'I' to refer to myself' is circular. It is true that this rule just means 'I use 'I' to refer to the object I am'. But this is only problematic for Anscombe because she is in the grip of a theory which insists that to be able to refer to an object the subject must have a conception of the object. Obviously that is not explained by the rule. It is this same belief which leads her to search for the sense of 'I'; what conception can be associated with it? I think that the mistake arises by trying to explain our capacity for first-person thought in the same way that we treat our understanding of what other people say. If we hear Smith say 'I am not Smith' then we, as listeners can think of the person called Smith (perhaps we have met him or heard of him), and we can identify the referent of 'I' demonstratively. But why should we assume that first-person thought behaves in the same way?

In subjective first-person thought a subject has first-personal grounds for his thought. He refers reflexively; he is the subject of the thought, and refers to himself, ascribing predicates to himself. Such thoughts can be directly expressed by 'I' in English, which the subject learns at an early age can be used to refer to



himself. It is not circular to say that a subject uses 'I' to refer to himself. It only seems circular if we think 'himself' must explain how the subject's mind 'latches on' to the object he is. But this is not what is going on in reflexive first-person thought. The subject's mind does not need to 'latch on' to an object in order to refer. This is only required for him to think of independent objects. He can refer reflexively, unproblematically, because he is the subject of the thought.

Some might object that the conclusion that the token-reflexive rule is circular does not depend on the premise that reference to oneself requires a conception of oneself. It may be conceded by the objector that Anscombe's picture of reference involving knowledge of the kind of object is important later on in her argument, but this is only when she attempts to show that if we refer using 'I' we can only be referring to an Ego. The notion of a conception does not come into play in the initial stages of Anscombe's argument, they might say. The initial premise is just that first-person reference differs from non-first-personal reference to oneself.

But why is it that first-person reference differs from non-first-person reflexive reference? Anscombe thinks we cannot explain this using the token-reflexive rule:

...unless the reflexive pronoun itself is a sufficient indication of the way the object is specified. And that is something the ordinary reflexive pronoun cannot be. ((1975), p137)

Throughout her argument, Anscombe's main contention is that the reflexive pronoun in the token-reflexive rule cannot explain to us what it is that Smith (her subject) knows; it cannot explain how his mind latches onto the object he is. There does not seem to be any problem about what the subject knows when he refers non-first personally to himself – he can pick himself out in the same way as he picks out other people and refer to himself in the same way. Non-first-personal reference to himself is the same as non-first-personal reference to other objects. But what is the special first-person way in which a subject refers to himself, which Anscombe believes is necessary to refer first-personally? Her whole issue is that the indirect reflexive 'himself' *should* explain to us what this special conception must be, but it can only do this in terms of 'I'. Because of this, any explanation of 'I' in terms of the token-reflexive rule must be

insufficient, and we must go on a search for what this special first-person conception could be. Anscombe's picture of reference and her assumption that reference in the first-person case must be similar to reference to independent objects underlies her argument. And it is because this is mistaken that her argument does not go through.

Those who object to my reading of Anscombe may still agree that her argument that the token-reflexive rule is circular does not go through. They may think this not because they believe there is an assumption concerning conceptions for reference, but because they think that Anscombe has not considered the contrast between referring to oneself by using the token-reflexive rule (first-person reference) and referring in a way which just happens to conform to the token-reflexive rule (non-first-personal reference to himself). This latter claim is correct, but it misses something, and on its own does not explain very much. What makes it the case that one is using the rule rather than just conforming to it? When the amnesiac Lingens refers to Lingens then he is referring to himself in the same way that he refers to other objects. In this thesis it has been argued that to do this the subject must be acquainted with the object. In this example, the subject Lingens is acquainted with an object – Lingens – which just happens to be himself. As he happens to be referring to himself, he happens to conform to the token-reflexive rule. The difference with first-person thought is that a subject refers using the token-reflexive rule. He refers reflexively to himself, the subject. Because he is the subject, he does not need to be acquainted with himself. The fact that no acquaintance is required shows us how referring using the token-reflexive rule can indeed be distinct from merely referring in conformity with the rule.

## **2 Rumfitt's Response to Anscombe**

Rumfitt, in 'Frege's Theory of Predication: An Elaboration and Defense, with Some New Applications' (1994), agrees that the token-reflexive rule is not circular. But he has different reasons for this. His view is not that there is something special about the first-person perspective. He does not think that it is by undergoing experiences from this perspective the subject can refer to himself reflexively. Instead, he thinks that when a subject intends to refer to himself he

does not have an intention towards an object. What the subject has is an intention to self-refer, which is the intention of an act. If an object (himself) were involved in the specification of the act, then in order to think about this object the subject would have to think about it in the way that he thinks about other objects. Rumfitt thinks that this means that the subject would have to *know* the object (himself). But because there is no object involved there is no need to explain how a subject can know himself.

) *just like us?*

Rumfitt's discussion, like Anscombe's, concerns how we are able to understand and use 'I' in language. He also starts from the token reflexive rule which he explains, when talking of Anscombe's example as

- (I) 'I' is the word Smith [a speaker] uses when he knowingly and intentionally speaks of himself. (Rumfitt (1994), p632)

Now recall that Anscombe thinks that this is not adequate, as the pronoun 'himself' cannot specify or explain how it is that Smith's mind 'latches on' to the object to which 'himself' refers if it is the ordinary reflexive. And if it is the indirect reflexive, she thinks it can only be explained in terms of 'I'. Rumfitt suggests that 'himself' is not a referring expression at all<sup>5</sup> – its function is not to pick out an object. So, even if one thinks that acquaintance with an object, or knowing an object, or having a conception of an object, is necessary for reference, this need not be present in the case of 'I'. Thus Rumfitt thinks that he can undercut Anscombe's circularity argument.

Rumfitt points out that there are two opposing interpretations of 'himself' in (I). The first he attributes to Evans (1977), in 'Pronouns, Quantifiers and Relative Clauses', and the second to Geach (1968, 1972). Evans's account seems the intuitive way to treat reflexive pronouns, and is what Anscombe assumes in her argument above. Evans says:

If  $\sigma$  is a sentence containing the singular term positions  $p_i$  and  $p_j$ , which are chained together, and  $p_i$  contains the singular term  $\tau$  and  $p_j$  contains the pronoun  $\kappa$ , then the denotation of  $\kappa$  in  $\sigma$  is the same as the denotation of  $\tau$ . (Evans (1977), p89)

In Anscombe's sentence 'Smith realizes (fails to realize) the identity of an object he calls 'Smith' with himself' she thinks that the word 'himself' refers to the same object as the subject term 'Smith', hence assuming that the pronoun is a

<sup>5</sup> Although 'I' is.

referring expression which picks up its referent in this case from the subject of the sentence. Rumfitt argues that instead pronouns should be analysed as Geach suggests. Geach believes that reflexive pronouns are not referring expressions at all. Instead, they are “surface manifestations of a higher-order linguistic functional of the same category as ‘Ref( $\phi$ )’” (Rumfitt (1994), p623). Ref( $\phi$ ), as Rumfitt explains, takes a two-place predicable  $h(\xi, \eta)$  to a one-place predicable  $f(\xi)$  “in such a way that for every name  $\mathbf{n}$ ,  $f(\mathbf{n}) = h(\mathbf{n}, \mathbf{n})$ .” (Rumfitt (1994), p604). The best way to think of what Rumfitt calls *predicables* is to think of them as symbolizing properties or relations. Rumfitt gives the following example: ‘ $x$  contradicts  $y$ ’ is a predicable, which symbolizes the relation of contradicting (p602). So in this example, the linguistic functional Ref( $\phi$ ) takes us from the two-place predicable ‘ $x$  contradicts  $y$ ’ to the one place ‘ $x$  contradicts  $x$ ’, or ‘ $x$  self-contradicts’. A predicable which needs completion by two singular terms to give an atomic sentence is taken by the functional to a reflexive predicable which needs completion by only one singular term. On this analysis of reflexive pronouns, the pronoun ‘himself’ has the same sense as Ref( $\phi$ ). We understand Ref( $\phi$ ) if we know what it would be for  $x$  to  $\phi$   $x$  when we know what it is for  $x$  to  $\phi$   $y$  (e.g. if we know what it is for  $x$  to kill  $x$  when we know what it is for  $x$  to kill  $y$ ). We are supposed to be able to grasp the sense of Ref( $\phi$ ) without having to grasp the sense of all its instances.

Rumfitt explains that he thinks that (I) – ‘I’ is the word Smith uses when he knowingly and intentionally speaks of himself – should be analysed as the word which Smith uses when:

(\*) Smith intends to do that. Refer to himself.

This differs from non-first-personal reflexive reference which may be analysed in other various ways, for example:

(+1) Smith intends to do that. Refer to Smith.

or

(+2) Smith intends to do that. Refer to that person with his pants on fire.

Using the accounts of intention and acts developed earlier in his paper, Rumfitt then analyses (\*) as:

Smith stands in the intending relation to the act ( $\beta$  refers to  $\beta$ ).

Rumfitt believes that in order to stand in the intending relation to an act, the subject must know what it would be to do an act (he calls this the 'conceptual requirement' (p622)). Because of this, he thinks that in order to be able to use the word 'I' Smith must know what it is to do the act ( $\beta$  refers to  $\beta$ ). But the act ( $\beta$  refers to  $\beta$ ) differs from the act (e.g.) ( $\beta$  refers to Smith) in that in order to know how to do the act, the subject does not need to know anything about an object. As Rumfitt explains, Smith can know what it is to do the act ( $\beta$  refers to  $\beta$ ) simply by understanding what it means for  $x$  to refer to  $y$ , and in addition, by having the

...second-level capacity of knowing what it is for  $x$  to Ref( $\phi$ ) if he knows what it is for  $x$  to  $\phi$   $y$ . It is these capacities that underpin the ability to discern the common predication in (for example) 'Jones refers to Jones', 'Brown refers to Brown', etc. (Rumfitt (1994), p633-4)

In first-person thoughts, as opposed to non-first-personal reference to himself, there is no need for Smith to be able to pick out the object which he is. In non-first-personal reference to himself, to meet the conceptual requirement, and so to know what it is to do an act (e.g. in case (+<sub>1</sub>)) Smith must know what it is to refer, and 'know who' Smith is. But in first-person thought he just needs to know what it means to refer, possess this second-level capacity, and intend to commit this act of self-reference. If this explanation is correct Rumfitt believes that anyone will:

...by virtue of understanding 'I', know that he may realize his ambition to refer to himself by uttering that word. And having explained what it is to intend to refer to oneself in terms that do not involve 'I', there is no circularity in using such a notion [the token-reflexive rule] to specify the meaning of 'I'. (Rumfitt (1994), p634).

Rumfitt avoids the need for a subject to have a conception of himself or be acquainted with himself when he thinks first-personally because no object is supposed to be in the act he intends when he intends the act of self-reference. Therefore, he does not need to be able to single out any object in order to meet the 'conceptual requirement'. This analysis is based on a general conception of intention developed by Rumfitt, where what is intended is not a particular state of affairs, but an act or act-type. In self-reference, I do not intend the state of affairs that *I* self-refer, or that *I* refer to *myself* (an object), or of reference to myself; I just intend an act of self-reference. If I did need to know who the agent was, or if there was an object involved, then Rumfitt's account would not undercut

Anscombe's argument if he still wished to conform to a similar underlying picture of reference. Then, to meet the conceptual requirement, I would need to be able to pick out the agent. To support his account, Rumfitt aims to make it clear that a subject can intend an act without intending that an agent perform an act, and he also attempts to explain how a subject can intend an act of self-reference.

Rumfitt's initial discussion of acts takes place within an analysis of what it is to order; he sees ordering as a three-place relation, relating *orderer*, *addressee*, and *act*. An act is defined as a thing done by an agent, and its identity conditions are given in terms of the identity conditions of the senses of action predicables which specify the act (Rumfitt (1994), p618). An action predicable is a predicable where the imperative of the predicable makes sense; for example, ' $\xi$  washes the dishes' is an action predicable because the imperative 'Wash the dishes!' makes sense. The action predicable ' $\xi$  washes the dishes' specifies the act of washing the dishes, and any and only action predicables with exactly the same sense will specify the same act. Thus it seems that acts are well-defined, and an act is indeed supposed to be distinct from a state of affairs; an act is *performed* by an agent, the agent is not involved in the definition of the act. It is therefore important to explore whether it is possible to order an act, rather than to order the state of affairs of someone performing an act.

Rumfitt considers this issue by examining how we might analyse the report of an order:

Knacker ordered Plod to arrest Mr. Hyde.

He rejects what might seem to be the obvious analysis, which would treat ordering as a relation between an orderer and a state of affairs. Such an analysis might be represented as follows:

Knacker ordered that. Plod arrest Hyde.

In this analysis, the second sentence specifies a state of affairs, and the first sentence represents Knacker being in the ordering relation to the state of affairs picked out by the demonstrative 'that'; the state of affairs specified by the second sentence. Rumfitt rejects this because he says that the sentence 'Plod arrests Hyde' misrepresents what Knacker actually ordered; he argues:

In giving his order to Plod, Knacker uses no word that designates Plod; indeed, he need not even know who Plod is. ((1994), p617)

This seems correct to an extent, but not fully correct. It is true that Knacker does not need to know who Plod is, and so having the name Plod in the specification of what is ordered may misrepresent the content of what is ordered. But Knacker does need to know who Plod is in another sense. He needs to know that he addresses his order to *someone*; he is acquainted with Plod and can single him out even if he does not know his name. In Rumfitt's preferred analysis:

Knacker ordered Plod to do that. Arrest Hyde!

the second sentence may better give the content of Knacker's order, as it does not mention Plod by name, but it still seems to contain an (implicit) grammatical subject. Rumfitt thinks that this analysis is equivalent to:

Knacker ordered Plod thus. You arrest Hyde.

saying:

The choice between these variants will, I suppose, turn on the fruitfulness of the linguists' notion of an understood grammatical subject, but for present purposes the choice is a matter of detail. Whether or not the second utterance of the parataxis contains a grammatical subject, what is crucial is that it suffices to identify a predicable, in this case 'ξ arrests Hyde'. ((1994), p618)

The two variants specify the same action predicable. But is it really an act that is ordered? The grammatical subject, understood or otherwise, is involved in specifying the content of the order. There is both an agent and an act involved in what is ordered – the act alone is not ordered, but rather the state of affairs of the agent performing the act. Thus the addressee seems to be an essential part of the state of affairs that is ordered. Knacker is ordering the agent Plod to arrest Hyde. Although the state of affairs he is ordering is better specified by 'You arrest Hyde' rather than the state of affairs specified by 'Plod arrests Hyde', this does not mean Knacker is not ordering an agent to perform an act. Rumfitt's analysis of ordering as a three-place relation between orderer, addressee, and act is somewhat misleading. It seems to me that the act must pick up its agent from the addressee, and it is the state of affairs involving the addressee which is actually being ordered.

However, it is the analysis of intention which is crucial in Rumfitt's explanation of how a subject can think first-personally. It does not matter if only states of

affairs rather than acts can be ordered, as long as acts without agents can be intended. Rumfitt sees his analysis of intention as similar to the analysis of ordering, only in this case the intending relation is supposed to be a two-place relation (rather than three-place) between intender and act. 'A intends to  $\phi$ ' is analysed as:

A intends to do that act.  $\phi$ .

Of course I accept that a subject can intend acts, rather than states of affairs. It is precisely such acts that are from the first-person perspective. The subject might intend to mow the lawn; he intends to do this act in the future. He intends this act from the point of view of the subject, who is to perform the act in the future. But Rumfitt, if his comparison with orders is anything to go by, does not seem to think of acts as understood in a first-personal way. Suppose Knacker orders Plod to do that act. Arrest Hyde. 'Arrest Hyde' is supposed to specify an action predicable which refers to an act. But it is not an act understood from the first-person perspective. Is Rumfitt's understanding of acts intended now supposed to involve acts from the first-person perspective?

I do not think that an agent can intend an act which is not from the first-person perspective. He can intend that other people perform acts, but this is to intend a state of affairs. He can intend that John mow the lawn, for instance. But here he is not just intending an act. And he may intend that he himself perform an act, in such a way that this intention is not from the first-person perspective. But if he is just intending an act, he must be thinking of this act from the first-person perspective.<sup>6</sup>

Rumfitt must be proposing that a subject can intend an act, where this does not involve intending himself to perform an act. If he has to intend himself to perform the act, then his account does not undercut Anscombe's. He will have to explain what it is for a subject to think of himself in the intention, and Rumfitt wants to avoid this. But once he accepts that a subject can intend just an act, then he surely must accept that there is a way of intending things from the first-

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<sup>6</sup> If a subject intends an act and if he intends that he himself perform an act, he is intending the same event to occur. But he is thinking of this event in two different ways, the first of which is first-personal.



person perspective. Just as there is a way of remembering from the first-person perspective; from the inside. And just as there is experiencing things from the first-person perspective. And if he accepts this, then his account is unmotivated. It is because there are such first-personal grounds that a subject can refer to himself. Such first-personal grounds are the basis for subjective first-person thoughts. The subject is the subject of such thoughts, and can think of himself reflexively, ascribing such experiences to himself.

*per se*

We can thus explain how a subject is able to think about himself first-personally without resorting to Rumfitt's analysis of a subject's intention to refer to himself being an intention of an act of self-reference. This is just as well, because it is unclear that we really understand what it is to intend such an act. Recall that Rumfitt's account has a 'conceptual requirement' that in order to intend an act a subject must know what it would be to do the act. We are supposed to know what it would mean to self-refer by knowing what it is for  $x$  to refer to  $y$  and possessing the second-level capacity of understanding  $\text{Ref}(\phi)$ . This means that we must understand what it is for  $x$  to  $\phi x$  if we understand what it is for  $x$  to  $\phi y$ . But how is it that we know what it is for  $x$  to refer to  $x$ ? If we understand how  $x$  can refer to  $y$  in terms of acquaintance, must acquaintance be involved in understanding how  $x$  refers to  $x$ ?

Some examples may make this point clearer. Suppose I understand what it is for Mary to scratch John's head. To do this, she must locate John, reach over to him, and scratch his head. But does my understanding of what it is for Mary to scratch Mary's head involve this? She does not have to locate Mary and reach her hand over to her to scratch her head. There is a particular way of scratching one's own head, which does not first involve locating someone and reaching out an arm. There is a specific way of moving one's own arm in order to scratch one's own head, and it is not clear that one can understand this on the model of scratching another's head. To take a different example, if I understand that Mary loves John or that Mary hates John, can I really understand on the basis of my understanding of  $\text{Ref}(\phi)$  what it is for Mary to love herself, or hate herself?

When a subject thinks first-personally he intends to refer to himself, the subject. He is the subject undergoing first-personal experiences, remembering things from the inside, and intending to act in the future. He ascribes such experiences to himself, and refers to himself, the subject. We do not need to explain how 'himself' can 'latch on' to an object. It is not an independent object which the subject needs to be acquainted with in order to refer; it is the subject, himself. And we do not need to explain 'himself' away, saying that it does not refer to an object. It does refer to an object – the subject – and the subject can think of himself unproblematically.

## Chapter 8

### First-Person Reference

The first-person perspective is key to understanding subjective first-person thought. Because he has experiences from this perspective, the subject can refer reflexively to himself. He has singular thoughts about himself. These are like singular thoughts about other objects in that the subject is thinking about a particular object. In first-person thought this object is himself. Whether or not his first-person thought is true depends on how things are with a particular object; himself. However, first-person thought differs from singular thought about other objects in that in order to think of himself first-personally, the subject does not need to be acquainted with himself. In this respect, reference in first-person thought is distinct from reference in thoughts about other objects.

It is unlikely that many will deny that there is a first-personal way of experiencing things which can ground first-person thoughts. A subject's judgement expressed by 'I am sitting down' is based on very different grounds from his judgement that John is sitting down. The latter judgement may well be formed on the basis of perceiving John in a sitting-down position. The former can be known from the inside. But it might be objected that some such experiences from the first-person perspective are precisely those where the subject is acquainted with himself in experience. He has information from himself, and it is this which enables him to think about himself first-personally. In Section 1 of this chapter it will be argued that this is not the case. Acquaintance is a relation which enables a subject to think of an object which is independent of himself. But this is not needed to ground reference in first-person thought. The subject is at the centre of his scheme of reference and refers reflexively. If he is acquainted with himself, and refers to himself because of this, then this is not first-person thought.

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him?

But if it is conceded that it is not a subject's presence to himself in experience which grounds reference in his first-person thoughts, then there may be a further worry. Anscombe (1975) argues that as what is normally required for reference is lacking in the first-person case, first-person thoughts expressed by 'I' do not

refer. I have argued that this is not the case. The subject refers to himself. But how can we be sure that this is indeed reference? Is the subject really an object of thought; an object among other objects? Wittgenstein thinks that 'I' as subject does not refer. Is this right? I do not think it can be. It is because a subject refers reflexively in subjective first-person thought that he is able to think of himself objectively and yet still first-personally.

My exploration of first-person reference concludes with a discussion of objective-first-person thought. This is first-person thought which does not have grounds which are from the first-person perspective. It is because a subject can think of himself reflexively in subjective first-person thoughts – reflexive thoughts he expresses with 'I' in English<sup>1</sup> – that he can think of himself in objective first-person thoughts. In objective first-person thoughts which are not immune to error through misidentification, acquaintance is indeed involved. Sometimes this might be the subject's acquaintance with what is in fact himself. But this acquaintance does not ground his first-person reference. Instead, this acquaintance partly grounds an identity judgement; the subject identifies himself with an object in the world. But he may sometimes – or even always – be mistaken that this object is himself. Yet this does not stop him thinking of himself first-personally.

## 1 The First-Person Perspective

Someone who holds that a subject is acquainted with himself when he experiences things from the first-person perspective is unlikely to think that he is acquainted with himself in all first-person experience. For example, Evans (1982) writes, in discussing a subject's grounds for his thought expressed by 'I see a tree':

Nothing more than the original state of awareness – awareness, simply, of a tree – is called for *on the side of awareness*, for a subject to gain knowledge of himself thereby. (Evans (1982), p232)

But Evans thinks that to be able to think what is expressed by 'I see a tree' the subject must have an adequate Idea of himself. He has this by being acquainted with himself – receiving information from himself – and identifying himself on the basis of this information. Evans thinks that the subject must think of himself

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<sup>1</sup> Or equivalent terms or verbal inflections in other languages.

as a physical object in the objective order. And he can think of himself in this way because he is acquainted with himself in some bodily experiences. Because of the nature of first-person memory, he can also think of himself as persisting through time.

It is particularly in cases of bodily experience and memory that it is thought that when a subject has a first-person experience or memory from the inside, not only is he experiencing or remembering, he is also experiencing or remembering *himself*. But it is not the experiencing or remembering of *oneself* which grounds first-person reference. It is the fact that the subject is having such first-person memories and experiences which enables him to think of himself reflexively. Reference in such cases is not grounded in acquaintance, nor is the first-person judgement based on an identity judgement of the subject himself with an object presented in a first-person way. He experiences things from a first-person perspective and ascribes such experiences to himself.

### 1.1 The First-Person Perspective in Experience

When a subject experiences sitting down he can experience this in a particular first-personal way in which he cannot experience another person sitting down. When he feels hot, or as though he will fall over, he again experiences these from the inside. But Evans (1982) argues that these are not just experiences of the subject. They are ways in which the subject perceives or experiences his own body:

We have what might be described as a general capacity to perceive our own bodies, although this can be broken down into several distinguishable capacities: our proprioceptive sense, our sense of balance, of heat and cold, and of pressure. (Evans (1982), p220)

These capacities to perceive our own bodies are supposed to be analogous to perception. When a subject perceives an object he receives information from that object. If the information is from an object then it is necessarily from that object – that object is present in experience. It is being so present in experience that puts the subject in a position to have a singular thought about the object.<sup>2</sup> The view of Evans (1982) is that the experiences – of bodily sensation, of heat

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 4, Section 2, for a detailed discussion of Evans's notion of information

and cold, of balance, etc. – provide the subject with information from himself. This puts the subject in the position to think about himself first-personally.<sup>3</sup>

One of Anscombe's arguments in 'The First-Person' (1975) is supposed to show that this cannot be correct. This argument starts from her premise that a subject can still think first-personally whilst amnesiac and sensorily deprived. If reference requires the presence of an object then the body cannot be present to the subject in such circumstances. The only object which can be present in such circumstances, she thinks, is an Ego, so reference in first-person thoughts must be to an Ego. Anscombe does not want to accept this conclusion, and neither does Evans. But while she concludes that a subject does not refer to himself when he thinks first-personally, Evans does not. In the particular scenario Anscombe describes, Evans thinks that the subject can still refer first-personally because he is disposed to receive information from his body. But he is willing to accept a conclusion which Anscombe finds unacceptable – that first-person thoughts usually refer, but in certain circumstances they can fail to refer.

If a subject has never had information from himself – if he has never been present to himself in experience – then Evans accepts that the subject's first-person thoughts do not refer:

Consider, for example, the perennial nightmare: the idea that a human brain might exist, from birth, in a vat, subject by clever scientists to a complex series of hallucinations (including kinaesthetic hallucinations), of a kind which would enable the brain to develop normal cognitive faculties...Here we have a case where a considerable element in the subject's conception of himself, both present and past, derives from nothing. In all his physical self-ascriptions, there is simply nothing from which his information derives. When he thinks he is moving, or that his legs are bent, there is nothing of whose physical condition he is, even inaccurately, informed. (Evans (1982), p250)

Could a brain in a vat refer to himself in thought? He is still undergoing experiences, albeit of a hallucinatory nature. Presumably many of the hallucinations he has been subject to, if they enable the brain to develop normal cognitive faculties, are from the first-person perspective. He seems to see the world about him, to touch it, etc. Can he refer to himself, the subject undergoing these (hallucinatory) experiences? It seems impossible to give a decisive answer

<sup>3</sup> Of course, Evans does not think that a subject's having information from himself is sufficient for reference – he must also fulfil Russell's Principle

to this. Campbell (1994) certainly seems to think that a subject can have thought about himself, based on hallucinatory experiences:

...the most radical mistakes about oneself are possible, consistent with the continued use of the first person. I may think that I am made of glass, or that I am a steam locomotive, and my experience may really seem to confirm this but these hallucinations would not deprive me of my use of the first person. The token-reflexive rule explains this immediately. (Campbell (1994), p126)

But someone who shares Evans's view would simply deny that this is possible. It is difficult to resolve the dispute.

I think that more useful cases to consider are those where a subject has experiences from the first-person perspective which are the result of deviant causal chains. Suppose a subject X is wired up to Y's body so that when Y is hot, or off-balance, or sitting down, X experiences being hot, or off-balance, or sitting down, from the inside. If such experiences were analogous to the perception of an object, then it seems in such cases that Y is being perceived, and not X. The information comes from Y, not X; X is acquainted with Y in experience, rather than X. But in such cases if X judges what he would express by 'I am hot' or 'I am about to fall over' or 'I am sitting down', it seems he is still thinking about himself, rather than Y. The subject X is the subject of these experiences, and thinks about himself. Because these experiences are as a result of being wired up to Y's body X ends up having false beliefs about himself. But he does not fail to think of himself.

over  
wired  
etc.

Evans would simply disagree with this, and say that in the scenario envisaged, X is not having a singular thought about himself or anyone else. Unlike the brain in a vat case, it is not that there is only hallucinatory information. There is genuine information, from object Y. But because X has been wired up to Y, X's senses are not functioning properly; he is not receiving information in the normal way. Because he is not receiving information in the normal way he cannot identify the object his attempted thought is about, and thus cannot conform to Russell's Principle – that to think about an object one must know which object one is thinking about. It is not that no object is present in experience – Y is present in experience. But because of the deviant causal chain, X cannot identify Y and think about him. In Chapter 4 of this thesis it has been argued that

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discriminating knowledge is not needed for reference to independent objects – what is necessary is that the object is present to the subject. If an object is present to the subject then he can think about that object rather than another one, and can have a thought about that particular object. But he does not need to know which object he is thinking about – he does not need to be able to distinguish it from others. The subject does not need to be able to show that he is thinking of one object rather than another – being acquainted with one object rather than another is enough to make his thought about one object rather than another. In the deviant causal chain case, if an object is present to the subject, then it clearly seems to be object Y, rather than X. Yet few would want to conclude that when X judges ‘I am about to fall over’ he is thinking of Y. What if this is based on an identity judgement? Could it be based on ‘That person (Y) is about to fall over’ and ‘I am that person’? But if information from himself is supposed to ground X’s first-person reference, how does he refer using ‘I’ here? He must have at least some first-person experiences where the information is from himself. But how does he distinguish between information which is from himself, and information which is from Y, in order to make the identity judgement? In both cases it seems more plausible that X is undergoing experiences, whoever’s body happens to be the source, and it is in undergoing experiences from the inside which grounds his reference to himself.

The experiences (or hallucinations of experiences) which ground a subject’s bodily self-ascriptions are experiences from the first-person perspective which the subject undergoes. The point of these experiences is not to present an object to the subject – he can refer to himself, undergoing the experiences. Any attempt to make these experiences a relation between subject and object misrepresents what is going on. This relation between subject and object is needed for a subject to think about independent objects, but not for him to think about himself.

Evans thinks that this is totally wrong. In defending his own view he says:

Many people will regard the remarks I have made about this [brain in vat] case as quite unintelligible. For I have spoken of *the subject* thinking...and wondering..., while at the same time I have denied that his 'I'-thoughts...have an object. Surely (people will object) this is unintelligible, for if there is a subject, thinking 'I'-thoughts, then his 'I'-



thoughts will concern himself. But why is it thought that self-identification, or thoughts about oneself, are as simple as this – so that, whenever there is a subject, then there is at least one thing he can unproblematically think about, namely himself? (Evans (1982), p251-2)

But it is as simple as this. A subject has experiences from the first-person perspective and can refer to himself. He can already think of himself. He does not need to be acquainted with himself in order to be in a position to think of himself.<sup>4</sup> Evans thinks that first-person reference cannot be unproblematic. He thinks that one reason such a view seems plausible is because of a “false analogy” with the use of the word ‘I’ in communication ((1982), p252). On hearing someone uttering ‘I’, an audience can think of the person saying ‘I’ as “the utterer of the word ‘I’” – that is, think of him by description. And so if this were the model for first-personal thought, we would have to think of ourselves as *the thinker of this thought*, or *the subject of these experiences*. Evans thinks that we do not think of ourselves in this way. I agree. But this is not what is being proposed here. A subject does not think of himself by description: he does not think of himself as the subject of these experiences. He *is* the subject of these experiences, but this is not how he thinks of himself. He thinks of himself reflexively, and has a singular thought about himself. It is not a thought about whatever fulfils a certain condition. It is a thought about a particular object.

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not  
him

## 1.2 The First-Person Perspective in Memory

Memory is a faculty for retaining information. If a subject has a memory-based singular thought about an independent object this is because he possesses retained information derived from an encounter with that object. The fact that he has once perceived the object and retains this in memory is enough for him to think about it. Even if he misremembers the object – perhaps he remembers it as yellow and it was red – he is still thinking about the object originally perceived. The object remembered is the one that was perceived and which led to the memory, not the one which fits the description.

What about memories from the first-person perspective? When he has such memories, does the subject possess retained information, derived from his being

<sup>4</sup> One reason why Evans thinks that this is unacceptable is because if this is how he refers, the subject cannot identify himself as an objective element in the world, and so cannot represent himself as one among others. This is discussed below in Section 1.4.

acquainted with himself? The memories of concern here are those that ground subjective first-person memory judgements. Recall Higginbotham's (2003) example<sup>5</sup> of a group of people getting together to tell John that he should finish his thesis by July. The subject remembering hearing a voice, 'hanging in the air', telling John to finish his thesis by July. He identifies this voice as his. On this basis he concludes that he told John to finish his thesis by July. But this is not a memory from the inside. He does not remember telling John to finish his thesis by July. He only has a memory from the inside if he remembers speaking as an act performed. In each case the same event is remembered, but it is remembered in different ways, one of which is from the first-person perspective.

So are such memories from the inside, which ground subjective first-person memory judgements, really cases where the subject is not acquainted with himself? When he makes memory judgements does he refer reflexively? Or is there information from himself retained in memory and it is this information which enables a subject to think about himself?

If the subject is not present to himself in present-tense experiences, there seems no reason why he would be present to himself in memories of these experiences. Suppose a subject has an experience from the inside, such as seeing a tree, or hearing a symphony, or singing a song. These experiences ground the subjective first-person thoughts expressed by 'I see a tree', or 'I hear a symphony' or 'I am singing a song'. The subject may later have first-person memories of these experiences. These memories ground the thoughts 'I saw a tree', 'I heard a symphony' or 'I sang a song'. As the subject is not acquainted with himself in the original experiences, neither is he acquainted with himself in memory.<sup>6</sup> First-person memories from the inside are not like memories of other objects. For when a subject first thinks about and later remembers an independent object he first must be acquainted with the object in order to think of it. This is retained

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<sup>5</sup> Discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, Sections 2.2 and 2.3

<sup>6</sup> Ayers (1991) p278 holds that in remembering one's past experiences and actions one's past self is in the content of the memory. He describes the opposing position as 'implausible'. But it is not at all obvious that it is implausible. I do not mean to suggest that there cannot be cases where the subject remembers himself, rather than first-person experiences. I only claim that the subject has *some* memories from the first-person perspective which do not involve himself in the content of the memory.

in memory, allowing the subject to think of the object later. But for a subject to think about himself he does not first need to be acquainted with himself. Hence acquaintance is not retained in memory in this case. The memory judgement is about an object, the subject, and this is because it is the subject who remembers the experience.

However, there is a debate about quasi-memory<sup>7</sup> in which some people seem to make the assumption that first-person memories from the inside are indeed ways in which a subject is acquainted with an object. The debate concerns whether such first-person memories really are immune to error through misidentification. It has already been noted that some memories which ground first-person memory judgements are not so immune. Higginbotham's (2003) example – of the subject remembering he told John to finish his thesis by July by remembering a voice hanging in the air and later identifying this voice as his – is such a case. This results in what I have termed an objective first-person thought rather than a subjective first-person thought. But first-personal memories from the inside – those that ground subjective first-person thoughts – are not supposed to be subject to such an error. For instance, Higginbotham thinks that if I remember saying to John that he should finish his thesis by July from the first-person perspective, then it does not make sense to wonder: 'Someone said John should finish his thesis by July, but did I say John should finish his thesis by July?'. But examples can be constructed which show that perhaps it does make sense to wonder this after all. These are cases where a subject's apparent memories are not about things he did or experienced, but are instead causally derived from someone else's experiences.

Apparent memories derived from someone else's experience are termed 'q-memories' by Shoemaker (1970) to get around the linguistic restriction that memories can only be about one's own experiences. Perhaps a perfect duplicate of a person, including his brain, has been made. The original person saw a tree, and the duplicate q-remembers seeing a tree, although he did not have the original experience. Or perhaps someone has had his brain divided in two, and transplanted into two new people. Both these people can q-remember the

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<sup>7</sup> The term 'quasi-memory' or 'q-memory' is introduced by Shoemaker (1970)

experiences of the original subject from the inside, as if they had the experiences, but they did not have the experiences. In such cases it seems to make sense for the subject to say: ‘Someone saw a tree, but was it I who saw a tree?’

Evans argues that a subject’s first-person memory-based judgements generally are immune to error through misidentification. However, in so arguing he seems to assume that both sides of the debate think that in first-person memory a subject has retained information from an object, just as he has retained information from independent objects in memory. In other words, the subject’s memory is of an object having an experience, rather than just a memory of an experience from the first-person perspective. Evans argues that where a subject’s memories are causally derived from someone else’s experience, he is not able to have a singular thought based on these experiences. This is because he thinks the subject is unable to identify a particular object on the basis of the memory. But the implication is that the subject *is* receiving information from an object here – the object from which the memory was causally derived – but because of the deviant causal chain, he cannot identify the object. Evans compares his response in this case to his responses in section 6.6 (on ‘here’-thoughts) and 7.3 (on bodily self-ascription):

This argument is of a kind with which we are already familiar, and we have seen that it fails to establish its conclusion (see 6.6 on places, and 7.3 on physical self-ascription.) [Shoemaker’s] argument presents us with a case in which information apparently possessed about an object in a certain way – the normal way – can underlie a judgement about an object which is based upon an identification. But it certainly does not follow from this that judgements about an object, based upon this way of possessing information about it, *must* be based upon an identification. (Evans (1982), p242)

In the examples discussed in Sections 6.6 and 7.3 the subject *is* supposed to be acquainted with, and receive information from, a place or an object. Purported counterexamples, involving deviant causal chains, are dealt with by Evans by saying that in such cases the subject would not be able to have a thought about the object, because despite being acquainted with the object, he cannot identify it. It is important to be careful about two different senses of ‘identification’ being used. By ‘identification’ in the above quotation, and where it concerns immunity to error through misidentification, Evans means that the subject does not think ‘I was *F*’ on the basis of an identification ‘That man was *F*’ and ‘I am

that man'. He does *not* mean that the subject does not have to identify himself in thought – the subject still must have discriminating knowledge of himself, or *know which* object he is thinking about.<sup>8</sup> This is a different sense of identification. His argument suggests that he thinks that in cases of quasi-memory, the subject is receiving information from an object (one we might try, but fail, to refer to as 'that man'). But as he cannot identify – have discriminating knowledge of – that man, he cannot think about that man. Thus he cannot have the thought 'That man was *F*' and 'I am that man' and so in such as case he would not be able to have a memory-based singular thought. But usually, there are no such deviant causal chains.

In information-based singular thoughts which are immune to error through misidentification, Evans thinks that the subject knows which object he is thinking about on the basis of the information he receives from the object. In first-person memory judgements the implication is that normally the subject knows which object he is thinking about; he knows this on the basis of the information retained in memory from himself. Where there are deviant causal chains, Evans thinks the error made is the assumption that the memory is functioning normally. But in normal circumstances, information is retained from the self, and the subject can think about and refer to himself on that basis. It is this information which grounds the uses of 'I'; it does not ground the use of 'That person'.

Yet if it is acquaintance rather than discriminating knowledge which is necessary for a subject to have a singular thought about an object then in the q-memory case, like the deviant causal chains in experience case, one would expect that if an object were present, it would be the object from which the memory derived. But if a subject says 'I saw a tree' on the basis of such a q-memory, then he is still referring to himself, making a mistake about his past experience. He is not referring to the person from whom the memory derived. His judgement 'I saw a tree' could, of course, be as a result of a mistaken identity judgement – the subject is acquainted with *that man* in memory, and thinks that that man is *F*. He

<sup>8</sup> Shoemaker does not think that such thoughts are based on an identification in the latter sense – he does not think there is any tracking of the self over time. ((1986/1996), p15-16)

at  
the point  
of  
information  
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evolution

the same  
information  
to be  
about himself

mistakenly identifies himself with that man, to think *I am F*. When these are genuine memories rather than q-memories, the identity judgement is not mistaken. But if such memory judgements are based on an identification, then the object present in experience does not ground the use of 'I'. It only grounds the use of the demonstrative 'that man'. How does the subject think first-personally, in order to identify himself with that man? Perhaps the reference of the first-person is only grounded in present-tense first-person experiences. The subject thinks of himself reflexively, and then identifies himself with the person presented in his memories. But I think it is much more plausible that such memories, whatever their source, are memories that the subject experiences from the first-person perspective, and in so experiencing this, he can also refer to himself, the subject. Their function is not to put the subject in contact with an object.

Pryor (1999) argues that there is a mistaken assumption in Evans's reasoning. He agrees with me that in memory the subject is not receiving information from an object. It is because he is not receiving information from an object that he is not in a position to have a singular thought about an object. No object is presented in a first-person memory experience. But Pryor still thinks that first-person memory judgements are not immune to error through misidentification. Because of the possibility of q-memory he thinks that a subject experiencing a memory from the first-person perspective is only entitled to conclude 'Someone was *F*' and not 'I was *F*'. The subject does not have the grounds for a singular thought, but only a general thought. Where the subject goes wrong, if this is indeed a q-memory, is in identifying himself as the thing that is *F*. I agree with Pryor that if a subject were presented with evidence that some of his first-person memories were q-memories then this would undercut his justification for believing what he would express by 'I was *F*'. But this does not affect the reference of the first-person. The subject, if he is to conclude 'I was *F*' on the basis of knowing that something is *F* and coming to identify himself as fulfilling the condition, still needs to be able to refer to himself. As above, perhaps he can think of himself only by having present-tense experiences from the first-person perspective and then identifies himself as the thing that was *F*. But this seems unlikely. In first-person memories which ground subjective first-person memory

judgements, the assumption is that the subject underwent the original experiences which have resulted in the memories being retained. And just as he can ascribe experiences to himself, he ascribes past experiences to himself, because he has a special first-person perspective on the world. These experiences, present or memories, are experiences the subject undergoes; even if they are hallucinatory or derived from another source, the subject himself undergoes these experiences, and ascribes them to himself, thinking of himself.

### 1.3 The First-Person Perspective on the Future

The claim so far has been that experiences and memories from the first-person perspective ground subjective first-person thoughts. There is a particular way of experiencing or remembering something from the inside, and because he experiences things in this way, the subject can think first-personally about himself. But Anscombe has claimed that a subject can still think first-personally when amnesiac and in a sensory deprivation tank:

0-2-11  
1-1-11  
1-1-11  
1-1-11  
1-1-11

And now let us imagine that I get into a state of 'sensory deprivation'. Sight is cut off, and I am locally anaesthetized everywhere, perhaps floated in a tank of tepid water; I am unable to speak, or to touch any part of my body with any other. (Anscombe (1975), p146)

When amnesiac and sensorily deprived, the subject is not remembering or experiencing anything first-personally. Anscombe's example is supposed to show that the body cannot be present in such a case; as the subject can still think first-personally, it cannot be the body's presence which grounds this. But is it also a problem for a reflexive account of first-person reference? He can still think first-personally, but as he is not experiencing or remembering anything, can he refer reflexively? Or should we conclude with Anscombe that a subject is not referring to an object when he thinks first-personally?

If the subject could not think at all, then of course he could not think of himself. But this is not Anscombe's suggestion. He can still think first-personally. The example Anscombe gives is:

Now I tell myself 'I won't let this happen again!' (Anscombe (1975), p146)

This is an intention, which is from the first-person perspective. Presumably if he can think this, the subject can also think things like 'I want to get out of here'; 'I hope to be somewhere else soon', and so on. The subject can intend, and desire,

— for the sake of what?

and hope things from the inside. This does not lead to Anscombe's conclusion: as the only thing that could be present is an Ego, if the subject is referring in these first-person thoughts he must be referring to an Ego. The subject is not referring to an object present to him; he is referring to himself, whatever he might be. In fact, as nothing is present to him in the sensory deprivation tank, the only object he can think about in there is himself.

#### 1.4 Do Subjective First-Person Thoughts Refer?

Anscombe concludes that 'I', used to express first-person thoughts, does not refer. This is because what is normally present for reference is not present in the first-person case. The proposal in this thesis is that what is normally present for reference is not needed in the first-person case. A subject's acquaintance with an independent object is needed to put him in a position to think of that object, but he can think of himself unproblematically.

But when a subject thinks reflexively, is he really thinking of an object? If he were acquainted with himself then he could think of himself as an object in the world. But if he thinks of himself reflexively, perhaps he is not thinking of an object in the world at all. Perhaps the subject is, as Wittgenstein puts it in *The Tractatus*, the 'limit of the world' and not in the world:

The subject does not belong to the world: rather, it is a limit of the world.  
(Wittgenstein (1922), 5.632)

This worry is related to the question: Are there thinking subjects in the world, which are among other objects in the world, and which can think about other objects in the world? I do not pretend to be able to prove that the answer to this question is yes. But if the answer is positive, as I think it is – if there are thinking subjects among other objects in the world – I see no reason why a thinking subject cannot refer to himself reflexively, at the centre of his scheme of reference. There is no reason why he would have to be acquainted with himself in the world in order to think of himself.

I think that trying to show that a subject is one among others in the world, and that he thinks of himself as one among others, is what underlies Evans's (1982)



account of first-person reference.<sup>9</sup> He wants to avoid Anscombe's and Wittgenstein's conclusion that a subject does not refer to an object in the world when he thinks first-personally. Evans argues that a subject must receive information from himself which enables him to think of himself as a physical object. If in order to be able to refer to himself a subject must be acquainted with himself as an object in the world, and think of himself as an object in the world, then we do not have the worry that first-person thoughts may always fail to refer. On Evans's view of first-person thought a subject must have an adequate Idea of himself as a physical object which is part of the objective order:

...this means that one's Idea of oneself must also comprise...a knowledge of what it would be for an identity of the form  $[I = \delta_i]$  to be true, where  $\delta_i$  is a fundamental Idea of a person: an identification of a person which...is of a kind which could be available to someone else. (Evans (1982), p209)

The subject can think things he would express by 'I am sitting down' because he knows what it is for a physical object to be sitting down.

Yet this seems to have things backwards. Does one really need to understand something like 'sitting down' at the fundamental level of thought? It seems that a subject can think *I am sitting down* precisely because he experiences this from the first-person perspective. And the subject ascribes this experience to himself. He can also ascribe 'sitting down' to other people on the basis of his acquaintance with them. He ascribes the same predicate to himself and others, and yet there seems no reason why his reference to himself must involve him antecedently thinking of himself as a physical object. On the basis of his experience from the first-person perspective he can think what he would express by 'I am sitting down'; because of this he may, if he thinks about it, later conclude 'I am a physical object'. But he does not need to be able to think of himself as a physical object in order to refer to himself in the first place. Reference to oneself comes first. Trying to work out what one is comes later.

It is because he is the one having experiences<sup>10</sup> from the first-person perspective that a subject can ascribe such experiences to himself and therefore think about himself. And it is because he has such experiences that he comes to make

Can one  
have  
experiences  
from

<sup>9</sup> I think this is also what underlies Strawson's discussion in *Individuals* (1959), Chapter 3.

<sup>10</sup> And memories, and intentions, hopes, desires, etc.

and  
prop. for ??

identity judgements: I am that person in the mirror, I am XX, I am this body, and so on. These judgements may or may not be correct. But in thinking them, the subject is identifying himself as an object in the world. He is identifying himself as an object in the world which can be thought of in several different ways; as that person in the mirror, as XX, or as this body, for instance. He is thinking of himself as one among other objects. In so doing he has objective first-person thoughts. But these identity judgements in no way ground the reference of the first-person.

If this seems problematic, it may be because in accepting this, we have to accept that a subject can refer to himself without knowing himself and without knowing what he is. But this is surely right. He does not need to know himself or know what he is in order to refer to himself. Because of his experiences, his observations and what he learns from other people, he may come to identify himself with an object in the world and will learn to ascribe predicates to himself based on these identities. He may also ascribe predicates to himself for which he has no grounds. The identity judgements which he makes – if they are correct – are informative identities. The subject thinks of himself reflexively and also as an object in the world with which he is acquainted. And it is right that these identities should be informative. In simply referring reflexively we *are* ignorant of what we are. It is in having objective first-person thoughts based on identity judgements that we enrich our understanding of what we are; and this understanding may or may not be mistaken.

no: v  
10, not v  
no: i  
no: p: .1  
y a  
a: from the -

## 2 Objective First-Person Thought

Objective first-person thoughts are first-person thoughts which are not subjective. They are not based on grounds from the first-person perspective. As Evans remarks:

It is vital to remember this feature of our thought about ourselves. 'I'-thoughts are not, as is sometimes suggested, restricted to thoughts about states of affairs 'from the point of view of the subject'. Nor can the thoughts ... be hived off from genuine self-conscious thought... (Evans (1982), p210)

A subject's objective first-person thoughts are not non-first-personal thoughts about himself. To use a familiar example again, Lingens's thought that Lingens is the cousin of a spy is a non-first-personal thought about himself. His thought

expressed by 'I am the cousin of a spy' is an objective first-person thought. It does not have internal grounds, but is genuinely first-personal. / m-

A subject can have objective first-person thoughts only because he can have subjective first-person thoughts. Because he has experiences from the first-person perspective he can ascribe these experiences to himself and think of himself. He has a self-notion, perhaps, or an ability to think of himself reflexively, and he can express this using 'I'. He refers to himself without knowing himself or knowing what he is, but he nonetheless thinks of an object, himself. He can think of other objects with which he is acquainted and ascribe properties to them. He can ascribe these same properties to himself, should he so wish. He can thus think thoughts such as 'I was breastfed', 'I was unhappy on my first birthday', 'I shall be dragged unconscious through the streets of Chicago' or 'I shall die', to use Evans's examples ((1982), p209). He ascribes these properties to himself. These objective first-person thoughts are immune to error through misidentification as they are not based on an identity judgement.

*After this  
we are!*

But many objective first-person thoughts *are* based on an identity judgement. The subject identifies himself with an object in the world. In order to think of this object in the world the subject must be acquainted with it – so acquaintance *is* involved in objective first-person thoughts which are not immune to error through misidentification. But this acquaintance (which, if he is not mistaken in his identity judgement, will be with himself) does not ground the reference of objective first-person thoughts. It does not ground the reference of 'I'. In the identity judgement expressed by 'I am X' the subject thinks of himself reflexively and thinks of X by being acquainted with X. It is an informative identity judgement, with the subject thinking of himself in two different ways. If he also thinks that X is *F*, then the subject will conclude that 'I am *F*'. But even if he is mistaken in his identity judgement, when he thinks what he would express by 'I am *F*' he refers to himself, the subject, reflexively. / ox

For instance, a subject may base his thought which he would express by 'I am six feet tall' on the judgements 'I am this body' and 'This body is six feet tall'. He can think 'This body is six feet tall' because he is acquainted with this body. But

when he thinks 'I am six feet tall', 'I' does not mean 'this body'. 'I' and 'this body' will both refer to the same object if the identity judgement is correct. But even if it is correct the subject will think of the object referred to in two different ways. One way is reflexively, and one way is because he is acquainted with it. In 'I am six feet tall', 'I' refers reflexively. If he is mistaken that he is this body then he judges falsely when he thinks 'I am six feet tall' but he still refers to himself.

In Chapter 2 it was argued that statements such as 'I am X' and 'I am this body' can be thought of as informative identity statements provided one has a notion of content which is fine-grained enough. A Fregean notion of content is fine-grained enough, where content is individuated in terms of sense, rather than reference. The important thing is to understand what is meant by 'sense'.<sup>11</sup> Senses are traditionally understood as modes of presentation of objects, following Frege (1892). This is well motivated for thoughts about independent objects. As was argued in Chapters 3 and 4, it is being acquainted with an object which puts a subject in a position to think about it. The object is present to the subject in experience, and it is this which enables him to have a singular thought about it, rather than another object. But the same object may be present to the subject in different ways; the modes of presentation may be different. Venus is presented in a different way in the morning and the evening; as Phosphorus and Hesperus. There are two different modes of presentation, and hence the thought Hesperus is Phosphorus can be informative. It is not the same as the thought that Hesperus is Hesperus, which involves only one mode of presentation of an object.

However, just because sense is often understood in terms of modes of presentation of objects, it does not mean that it must always be understood in this way. Instead, I think sense should be understood as a *way of thinking* of an object.<sup>12</sup> The way of thinking of an independent object involves the object being present to the subject. The same object can be present to him in different ways, without him realizing this. But thinking reflexively is also a way of thinking of

<sup>11</sup> This has always been a problem for accounts of content in terms of sense.

<sup>12</sup> Evans (1982) Chapter 1 suggests understanding Frege's notion of sense in terms of ways of thinking of objects

an object. Almost all ways of thinking of objects involve acquaintance – the objects being present to the subject – which is why it seems natural to individuate content in terms of modes of presentation. But this is a mistake. To do so is to presuppose what is involved in thinking of objects.

In Chapter 2 it was argued that Lewis's account in 'Attitudes *De Dicto* and *De Se*' cannot be quite right, because although it correctly identifies the first-person perspective, it does not identify an entity, thought of first-personally. Mary's thought expressed by Mary as 'I am sitting down' and Jane's thought expressed by Jane as 'I am sitting down' have the same content. The proposal that a subject thinks of himself reflexively does not have this consequence. Mary thinks of Mary when she thinks reflexively. Jane thinks of Jane when she thinks reflexively. They both think reflexively, but as the objects thought of differ, the content of such thoughts is not the same. We can also use this proposal to account for the difference between some subjective and objective first-person attitudes. Recall Lewis's account cannot distinguish the contents of, for instance, 'I imagine playing *Three Blind Mice* on the piano' and 'I imagine myself playing *Three Blind Mice* on the piano'. The former is subjective – the experience is imagined from the inside. The latter need not be. It may be non-first personal – the subject may imagine someone who happens to be himself. But it may also be first-personal, but from an external perspective. In this case, it is an objective first-person thought which is immune to error through misidentification because it is not based on an identification – the object imagined is specified to be himself.<sup>13</sup> But these differences can be captured with the present proposal. The content of the subjective imagining is an unstructured experience, from the first-person perspective. The content of the objective imagining involves the subject himself having an experience. But the subject is thought of reflexively – he need not be thought of non-first-personally. The object imagined is stipulated to be himself.

Anscombe, towards the end of 'The First Person' (1975), says that as long as we think of 'I' as a referring expressing there is a deep divide between those who think that a subject's reference in the first-person case must be the same as his

<sup>13</sup> See discussion in Chapter 2, Section 1, for the problems for Lewis's account

reference to other objects, and those who do not. She thinks that those in the former camp have not perceived the difficulty; they do not appreciate the problem of first-person thought (p148). I agree. To refer to independent objects a subject must be acquainted with them, but to think this model applies to first-person thought is entirely inappropriate. A subject's experiences from the first-person perspective do not put him in contact with an object (himself) and so enable him to refer to himself. They are experiences which he undergoes, and which he can self-ascribe. But Anscombe goes on to say that those that have perceived the difficulty, and yet continue to think that first-person thoughts refer, "are led to rave in consequence" (p148). I hope that enough has been said to show that this is not the case.

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